

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKYU)

GENESISシリーズ

境界線上の ホライゾ

上
I

GENESIS Series
Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon I (A)

Medieval Japan also known as the Divine States is divided between and ruled by different countries. The eight ships of the city ship Musashi cruise in the sky above—
In the distant future, the countries have experienced the Harmonic Unification War and they recreate history based on the Testament which holds the fate of mankind. The people open up the way to the future with various intentions and decisions in their hearts.
With multiple overlapping medieval worlds as the stage, the students began a conflict between academy states!
Taking place in an age between the AHEAD Series of "Owari no Chronicle" and the City Series, the grand story of the "GENESIS" Series finally begins!



か-5-30



境界線上のホライゾンI(上)

川上 稔

電撃文庫
750



9784048672184



1920193007503

ISBN978-4-04-867218-4
C0193 ¥750E



Published by ASCII Media Works

Recommended retail price: **750 JPY**
※Consumption levy will be added to the price separately



Kawakami Minoru

Born January 3, 1975. From Tokyo. For my first new series in three years, I made a setting document that filled 780 A4-size pages with text. It made my editor cry.

[Dengeki Bunko Novels]

City Series

Panzerpolis 1935

Aerial City

Tune Bust City Hong Kong <A>

Noise City Osaka <A>

Closed City Paris <A>

Panzerpolis Berlin 1-5

Virtual City DT <A>

AHEAD Series

Owari no Chronicle 1~7

GENESIS Series

Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon I <A>

[Dengeki Novels]

Renshaou <A>

Illustrations: Satoyasu (TENKY)

Born in Yamagata and raised in Tochigi. "When alternating between soy sauce senbei and sesame senbei during breaks in work, the sesame ones have such a wonderful aroma." Those are the words of a sommelier.

• 『 About this World 』 •

In the distant future,
there was a need to restart the world's history.

But in the middle ages,
Far East Japan caused a crisis in the world,
which resulted in its
separation and control by the Academies
of all the nations in the world.

As the environment outside of the
Far East was uninhabitable, the
various nations could not return
to their homelands, so while under the
control of every nation in the world,
in the Far East, a life with the Kings
of the various countries living together
with the Sengoku Daimyo in the
Academy had begun.

Name: Makiko Oriotorai

Nowadays, the wars
and strife happening
are all according to
the recreation of
history.





4

world



Each nation formed a union with the Sengoku Daimyo in their corresponding position within the Far East, based on the world map. The countries fight for dominance inside this land, while recreating the Japanese Sengoku ← *On the test?* Period and the Thirty Years' War.

Nowadays, the citizens of the Far East are allowed to live only at the foreign settlements of every nation or in the Airship-city Musashi.



Name:

Black Algae
Creatures

《武蔵アリアダスト教導院きようどういん…学生代表内訳うちわけ》

『総長連合』
そうちよう

・総長 あおい … 葵・トリー

・副長 とくむ … 不在

・第一特務 ちようほう (諜報) … 点蔵・クロスユナイト

・第二特務 (裁判) … キヨナリ・ウルキアガ

・第三特務 (実働) … マルゴット・ナイト

・第四特務 (実働) … マルガ・ナルゼ

・第五特務 (実働) … ネイト・ミトツダイラ

・第六特務 (実働) … 直政 なおまさ

『生徒会』

・会長 … 葵・トリー

・副会長 ほんだ … 本多・正純 まさずみ

・会計 … シロジロ・ベルトーニ

・会計補佐 ほさ … ハイディ・オーゲザヴァラー

・書記 しよき … ネシンバラ・トゥーサン

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《Musashi Ariadust Academy: Student Representative Layout》
『Chancellor's Officers』

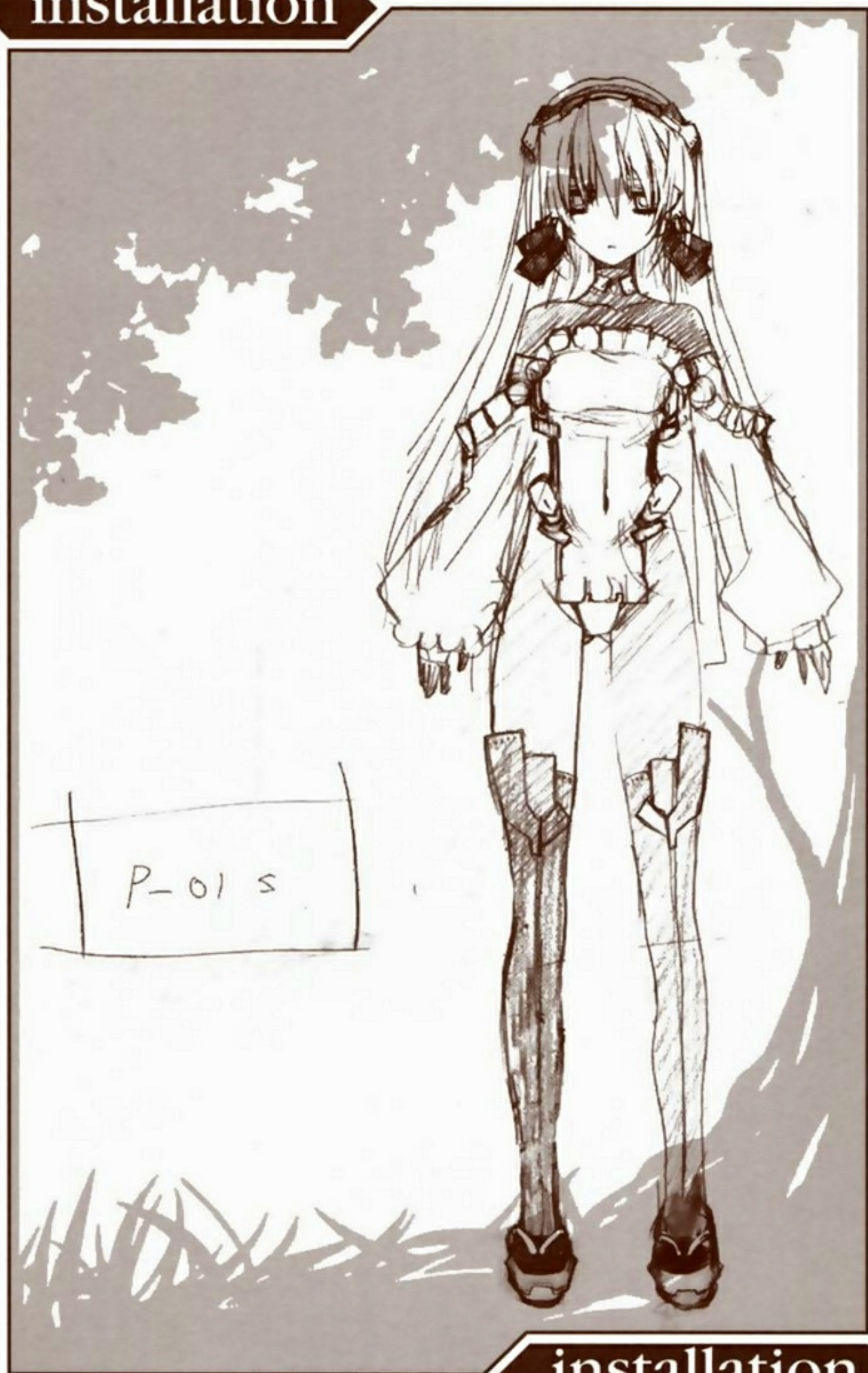
- Chancellor: Aoi Toori
- Vice Chancellor: N/A
- First Special Duty (Intelligence): Tenzou Crossunite
- Second Special Duty (Judgment): Kiyonari Urquiaga
- Third Special Duty (Field Operation): Margot Naito
- Fourth Special Duty (Field Operation): Malga Naruze
- Fifth Special Duty (Field Operation): Nate Mitotsudaira
- Sixth Special Duty (Field Operation): Naomasa

『Student Council』

- President: Aoi Toori
- Vice President: Honda Masazumi
- Treasurer: Shirojiro Bertoni
- Treasurer's Assistant: Heidi Augesvarer
- Secretary: Toussaint Neshinbara

Installation

installation



installation

installation

■ 「P-01s」 ■

I had already designed a lot of automated dolls,
some of which had appeared in other stories,
but since she's the main heroine this time
I opted for some new features.

Her basis is that of a living body,
and she's of the type whose joints are coated.

The heat circulation isn't very efficient,
so the skin has the tendency of sweating easily.

The coated parts, as well as the sides of her upper and lower body,
the area from the neck to above the chest, and both her arms and fingers,
are made of a soft black material.

In the "setting image" on the right, her neck and shoulders are black too,
but not because she's wearing something; it's just her skin colour.

Below this region, she is made of exactly the same material as a
normal person, so it might be easier to imagine that if she takes off her
clothes, there would be a black shirt tucked above her chest.

The reason that her arms and neck are entire black is because
her motor parts are packed tightly in those regions.

Her four limbs and head can be separated for maintenance
(in the case of a long-term maintenance of the head
it's necessary have a preservation system),

but cleaning the joints, changing lubricants, or other small maintenances
are performed through the hidden socket in the white region of each part.

On each side of the head, the heat radiators above and the
various types of sensors below the ears could be seen.

It looks like her ears are covered by headphones because
the base of the sensors is positioned below each ear.

When she is trying to distinguish sounds, you can
imagine her putting her hand in the headphone.

Her clothes aren't that of a maid, but something like a
sweater to give her a homey image
(other reasons will be explained later in the novel).

Below, she wears an inner suit that has the top in the form of a tube.
Furthermore, the black colour covering her legs

are part of the inner suit and the leg armour,
and under that, her legs are mostly made the same as normal people.
(Kawakami Minoru)

installation

- P-01s

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(Kawakami Minoru)

**Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon - Horizon on the
Middle of Nowhere - 1A**



—I want to be by your side.

I
上

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)

— — I want to be by your side.

Characters

horizon
on the Middle
of Nowhere
episode.01



- Character 1

Name: Aoi Toori

Faction: Musashi Ariadust Academy

Position: Chancellor and Student Council President

Style: Lively

Special Trait: Super useless



character

2

Name: Aoi Toori

Faction: Musashi Ariadust Academy

Position: Chancellor and Student Council President

Style: Lively

Special: Super useless

Name: P-01s

Faction: Tama citizen

Position: Shopkeeper in a bakery

Style: ???

Special: Silent Automated Doll

character

1

- Character 2

Name: P-01s

Faction: Tama citizen

Position: Shopkeeper in a bakery

Style: ???

Special Trait: Silent Automated Doll

About this World

4

world



Each nation formed a union with the Sengoku Daimyo in their corresponding position within the Far East, based on the world map. The countries fight for dominance inside this land, while recreating the Japanese Sengoku Period and the Thirty Years' War. **← On the test?**

Nowadays, the citizens of the Far East are allowed to live only at the foreign settlements of every nation or in the Airship-city Musashi.

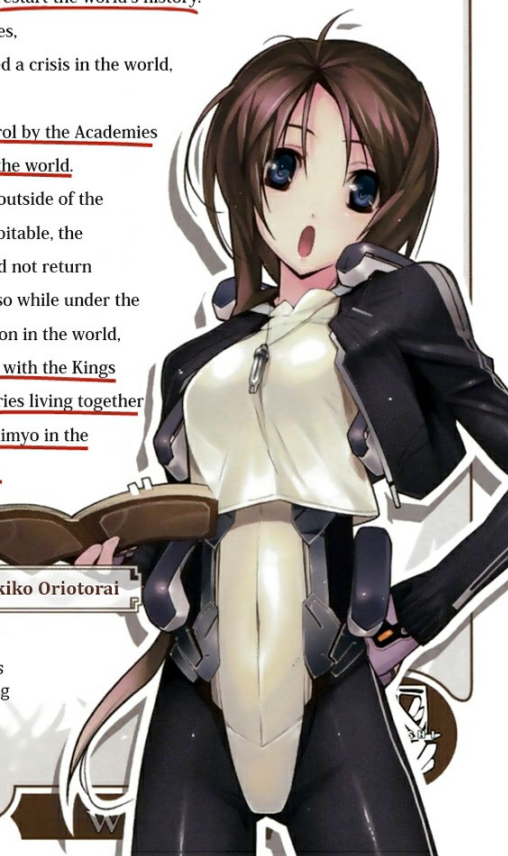
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**"Musashi Divine Transmission" — *News that
Citizens are Grateful for.***

"Musashi Divine Transmission"

News that Citizens are Grateful for.

● Regarding Today's Plans

(Communications)

To the citizens of Musashi, are you all working hard to pay the taxes today? This is "Musashi".

Today, Musashi passed from the Tian Shan Corridor to the Sagarmatha Corridor, and will be arriving at the main port of Mikawa.

On the way, we will be passing over some villages in the mountainous area of Mikawa, and as surprising them would be a disgrace to Musashi, the ship will be entering information-shielding stealth flight mode for those periods.

Afterwards, around noon the ship will dock at the Mikawa continental port, so there could possibly be some small tremors.

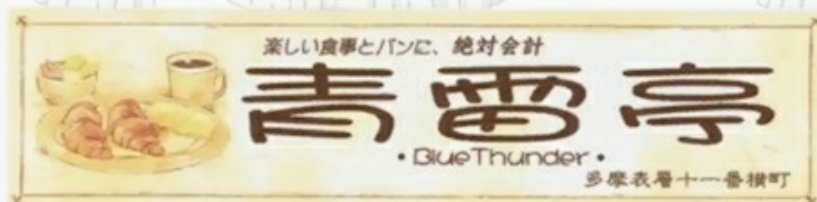
Please refrain from playing games such as "This year's biggest wave came" on the chains connecting the ship's compartments. It is quite troublesome if you fall and the Gods of War from the Testament Union will be seriously annoyed.

After this is the Business Time that the merchants are much anticipating, but there is the possibility that Lord Motonobu will come give his "greeting", so the situation can change at any time. Everyone, if you behave yourselves then I will be very happy.

—Over

● Famous Shops Welcome You

(Guide to Musashi)



Today we will be introducing the café/bakery that is very popular with the students: "Blue Thunder".

It boasts a large variety of products together with reasonable prices, and is a big help to the poor students who always claim to be one step away from starvation.

However, lately there have been customers who clasp the hand of the employed automated doll when she is handing back the change, and this is turning into a rather complicated matter.

I heard that the shopkeeper is a former samurai, so there might be the possibility of this ending with her blade, but "Musashi" believes a gentle branding would be suitable.

—Over

Categories

- Greetings (1)
- Communications (7650)
- Emergencies (573)
- It's Important to Live a Worthwhile Life (13)
- Tonight's Dinner (2)
- Guide to Musashi (1192)
- Scold Sakai-sama (666)
- Missing Person Reports for Toori-sama (893)
- Undesirable Meetings for Reflection (1582)

Recent Topics

- Regarding Today's Plans
- Famous Shops Welcome You
- The Fixation with "—Over"
- Once Again Sakai-sama...
- Once Again Toori-sama...
- I'm Not Angry
- Formal Presentation of Each Captain (twelfth time)
- Introduction of Dangerous Spots in Each Region's Corridors
- I Made Him Eat it
- I Tried to Cook Dinner
- The Great Disaster at the Teachers' Yakiniku Competition

Links

- Musashi Bridge Public Relations Department
- Tamako's page
- I'm Not Afraid of the Chancellor's Board
- It's the Student Council!
- Asama Shrine "Proud of Our Daughter"
- Provisional Council MIKKOKU's box
- Musashi Business Administration "Money! Money! Money!"
- Musashi Engineering Club "Labor that Never Ends"
- IZUMO-Musashi Business Trip Group
- Teachers Team "Sparta-san"
- Sakai-president "That's Enough"
- Christmas Subjugation Unit
- Valentine's Opposition Alliance
- Summer Vacation Resistance Union

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— — Over.

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Far East History

極東史

Far Eastern History

AIR I.A.D.U.S.T.

First of all

To the Far East, the ages that will be known as the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period will be marked by how much the world and people faced their fates and confronted it. It would be very grateful if this could help when learning about it.



I 〈A〉

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|---|
| Prologue - Those Lined Up Before the Horizon P21 | Table of Contents P9 |
| Chapter 01 - Participants in a Chance Meeting by the Storefront P105 | Character Introduction P10 |
| Chapter 02 - The Wrecking Crew in the Classroom P115 | Glossary P12 |
| Chapter 03 - Innocents at the Table P143 | History P14 |
| Chapter 04 - The Foreigner King P159 | Study ●History● P104 |
| Chapter 05 - Those Reunited Under the Fair Sky P175 | Study ●Musashi● P114 |
| Chapter 06 - Fated Ones Beyond the Door P191 | Study ●Musashi's Administrative Divisions● P142 |
| Chapter 07 - Philosophers Atop the Stairs P201 | Study ●Mikawa Surroundings Outline Map● P200 |
| Chapter 08 - Doubters in the Depths of a Ravine P225 | Study ●Internal Situation of the Far East● P448 |
| Chapter 09 - The One Waiting Beyond the Door P243 | |
| Chapter 10 - Commandos In Town P257 | |
| Chapter 11 - Adults in the Pub P287 | |
| Chapter 12 - Innocents in Remorse Way P301 | |
| Chapter 13 - The Authorities at the Rendezvous Point P323 | |
| Chapter 14 - Covert Operatives Under the Night Sky P339 | |
| Chapter 15 - Gathered Friends in the Confined Room P361 | |
| Chapter 16 - Those Who Prepare in the Courtyard P375 | |
| Chapter 17 - Usurper in the Street P411 | |
| Chapter 18 - The School Teacher P449 | |
| Chapter 19 - He who Dashes through the Air P479 | |
| Chapter 20 - Graduates Under the Moon P507 | |

Illustrations: Satoyasu (TENKY)

Cover Design: Watanabe Kouichi (2725 Inc)

Book Design Concept: TENKY

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Table of Contents 1-A

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- Character Introduction
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- Explanation - Musashi
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- Explanation – Musashi’s Administrative Divisions
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- Chapter 04 - The Foreigner King
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- Explanation – Schematic Diagram of Mikawa's Neighborhoods
- Chapter 07 - Philosophers Above the Stairs
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Characters



Aoi Kimi

Toori's older sister and worshipper of the god of eroticism and dancing. Fundamentally high-tensioned and selfish in practice.



Aoi Toori

Protagonist. Musashi Ariadust Academy's chancellor and student council president. Mr. Impossible.



Asama Tomo

Daughter of the Asama Shrine, Musashi's main shrine. Childhood friend and overall victim of Toori and Kimi.

Azuma

Child of the emperor and a half-god. All his abilities have been sealed and he lives on the Musashi.

Adele Balfette

From a vassal family that arrived from France. Glasses girl.

Itou Kenji

Cheerful incubus. Nude, bald, and muscular. Known as Itoken.

Ohiroshiki Ginji

Gourmet otaku with a Heart-sama style build.



Kiyonari Urquiaga

2nd special duty officer. Flying half-dragon. Hopes to be an inquisitor. Known as Uqui.

Shirojiro Bertoni

Treasurer. Young leading member of Musashi's commerce and industry guild.



Tenzou Crossunite

1st special duty officer. Ninja and errand-runner who always covers his face with his hat.

Toussaint Neshinbara

Secretary. Loves history, wants to be an author, and writes doujins.

Naomasa

6th special duty officer. Older sister type who works in the engine division. Smokes and laughs loudly.

Nate Mitotsudaira

5th special duty officer. Member of a knight family and inheritor of the Mito Matsudaira name. Half werewolf.

Nenji

Slime with about 3 HP. Manly.



Noriki

Laborer boy who supports his family. Clumsy martial artist. Silent and unsociable.



Heidi Augesvarer

Treasurer's aide. Shirojiro's partner. Has a white fox named Erimaki.

Hassan Furubushi

Calpis logo style Indian. Lives while eating and drinking only curry.



Persona-kun

Super macho man with a bucket helmet. Silent, strong, and kindhearted.

character

character

Honda Masazumi

Vice president of the student council. Diligent exchange student who arrived from Mikawa the previous year. Has various issues with her family.



Malga Naruze

4th special duty officer. Black-haired six-winged Weiss Hexen. Member of the manga club.



Margot Naito

3rd special duty officer. Blonde-haired six-winged Schwarz Hexen. Always smiling.

Miriam Poqou

Girl who stays in her room because she requires a wheelchair.



Mukai Suzu

Blind but always gives it her all. Acts as everyone's stopper.

Academy's Affiliates



Oriotorai Makiko

High-speed battling teacher. Always wears a track suit.



Sakai Tadatsugu

Musashi Ariadust Academy's president. Used to be a very able person but was demoted.



"Musashi"

Automaton that supervises the Musashi and overall commander. Her sharp comments are hard to put up with.

Yoshinao

King of Musashi who was sent from Hexagone Française. Has a veto right toward the academy and has the authority to manage Musashi.

Citizens



P-01s

An automaton who seems to have boarded Musashi last year. Currently an employee at a café/bakery.

Others

Innocentius

Pope-Chancellor. Leader of the Catholics and representative of K.P.A. Italia.

Oda Nobunaga

A name-inheritor appeared recently, but that inheritor has not appeared out of fear of Testament Union assassins.

Horizon A.

The girl whose name was left on the stone slab in Remorse Way.

Matsudaira Motonobu

Mikawa's ruler. He is a "Yes Man", but he keeps his neutral state between the Testament Union and P.A. Oda.

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- Heidi Augesvarer: Treasurer's aide. Shirojiro's partner. Has a white fox named Erimaki.
- Hassan Furubushi: Calpis logo style Indian. Lives while eating and drinking only curry.
- Persona-kun: Super macho man with a bucket helmet. Silent, strong, and kindhearted.
- Honda Masazumi: Vice president of the student council. Diligent exchange student who arrived from Mikawa the previous year. Has

various issues with her family.

- Malga Naruze: 4th special duty officer. Black-haired six-winged Weiss Hexen. Member of the manga club.
- Margot Naito: 3rd special duty officer. Blonde-haired six-winged Schwarz Hexen. Always smiling.
- Miriam Poqou: Girl who stays in her room because she requires a wheelchair.
- Mukai Suzu: Blind but always gives it her all. Acts as everyone's stopper.

● Academy Affiliates

- Oriotorai Makiko: High-speed battling teacher. Always wears a track suit.
- Sakai Tadatsugu: Musashi Ariadust Academy's president. Used to be a very able person but was demoted.
- "Musashi": Automaton that supervises the Musashi and overall commander. Her sharp comments are hard to put up with.
- Yoshinao: King of Musashi who was sent from Hexagone Française. Has a veto right toward the academy and has the authority to manage Musashi.

● Citizens

- P-01s: An automated doll who seems to have boarded Musashi last year. Currently an employee at a café/bakery.

● Other

- Innocentius: Pope-Chancellor. Leader of the Catholics and representative of K.P.A. Italia.
- Oda Nobunaga: A name-inheritor appeared recently, but that inheritor has not appeared out of fear of Testament Union assassins.
- Matsudaira Motonobu: Mikawa's ruler. He is a "Yes Man", but he keeps his neutral state between the Testament Union and P.A. ODA.
- Horizon A.: The girl whose name was left on the stone slab in Remorse Way.

Glossary

F

Fan Gang: Qing brand. Durable but a bit rough.
Far East: Name of the Divine States after the Harmonic Unification War.

Fino Alba (Star of Mechanical Devices): K.P.A. Italian brand. Their use of springs is their selling point.

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God of War: A giant humanoid machine that people combine with to move.

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Inherited Name: The name of a historical figure given to an appropriate individual for the history recreation.

Internal Blessings: Blessings stored within oneself.

IZUMO (Izumo Industries): The Far East's largest corporation. The headquarters for Far Eastern shrines and the corporation that built the Musashi.

J

Jud./Judgement: Means "understood". Used by criminals.

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K.P.A. Italia: K.P.A. Italia: Association of Aki States + Union of Italian City States.

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Academy: An educational facility. Used as the center of political and military power. Tend to have many branch schools.

Academy Rules: The basic laws upheld between academies. Agreed to by the Testament Union.

Apocalypse: The end of the world. 1648 when the Testament's history descriptions end.

ATELL: The smallest unit of ether. Used for spells.

B

Blessings: The amount of ether needed for a human to exist for one hour. 3600 ATELL. Conversion unit for a spell's ATELL consumption.

C

Catholic (Old Faith): The old mainstream version of Tsrhc.

Chancellor's Officers: An organization led by the chancellor which leads the academy and performs work such as defense.

Contradiction Allowance: The foundational ability of the world. Allows the simultaneous existence of all sorts of physical laws.

D

Divine States: Former name of the Far East.

Divine Weapon: A weapon that, unlike a normal weapon, has a unique ability.

E

Edel Brocken (Overlooking Magic Mountain):

Magic brand. Location of headquarters unknown.

Emperor: A divine individual who is said to control the ley lines using the Imperial Regalia in Kyou. Does not interfere with the world.

England: Uses a floating island and does not control any Far Eastern land or Far Eastern daimyo.

Ether: Component that makes up contradiction allowing space.

Ether Engine: An engine that uses ether's space-altering ability. The effect changes based on the internal crest.

Ether Fuel: Ether that has been purified into fuel. Used as External Blessings or for ether engines.

Ether Reactor: A reactor that extracts and purifies ether from the air. Has a lower output than a ley line reactor, but is relatively safe.

External Blessings: Blessings accumulated outside of oneself. Ether fuel is an example.

words

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- San Mercado (Pure Metropolis):** Tres Español brand.
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- Tsirhc:** A religion which places the Son of God at the top. Worships the Testament.

L

- Ley Line:** The thicker of the pathways through which ether flows.
- Ley Line Reactor:** A reactor that extracts and refines ether from ley lines. Can easily cause ley line mutations and destroy everything within several kilometers if they explode. Due to their instability, they are banned by the Tsirhc religion.
- Logismo Oplo (Deadly Sins' Weapons):** Weapons of mass destruction created on the motif of the seven deadly sins.

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- Magic:** Folk spells currently under persecution in Europe.
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- Mouse:** A spirit beast device to act as an intermediary between the Shinto religion and its musicians. Other religions use different names.
- Musashi:** Aerial city ship. The sole independent territory allowed for the Far East.

O

- Offering:** Providing a god with something they will enjoy or Internal Blessings.
- Orei Metallo/Water:** Ore or water containing ether. Can be used as ether fuel.

P

- P.A.ODA:** Oda clan + Osman (Ottoman).
- Peace of Westphalia:** The peace treaty that ended the Thirty Years' War.
- Protestant (New Faith):** A new style of Tsirhc created to escape the corruption of Catholicism and to adjust to the new age.
- Provisional Council:** Group of adults who act as bureaucrats toward Musashi's student council, chancellor's officers, and student committees.

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History

"In the past, humanity moved to reside in the heavens because of the deterioration of this planet's environment.

However, humanity, who had become gods in the heavens, started a war.

The realm of heaven, the realm of hell, destiny itself... almost everything other than this current world collapsed.

And once again, they who had lost their power returned to this land, called Earth.

However, the environment of this planet had been overly regenerated because of the environmental gods that had been left on this land.

Monsters and mutants roamed; it was a world with an unforgiving natural environment.

Humanity remained on the land where they had descended. The island where the gods who controlled nature resided, 'The Divine States'.

They were left unable to cross even the seas, let alone the skies."

A powerless humanity



history

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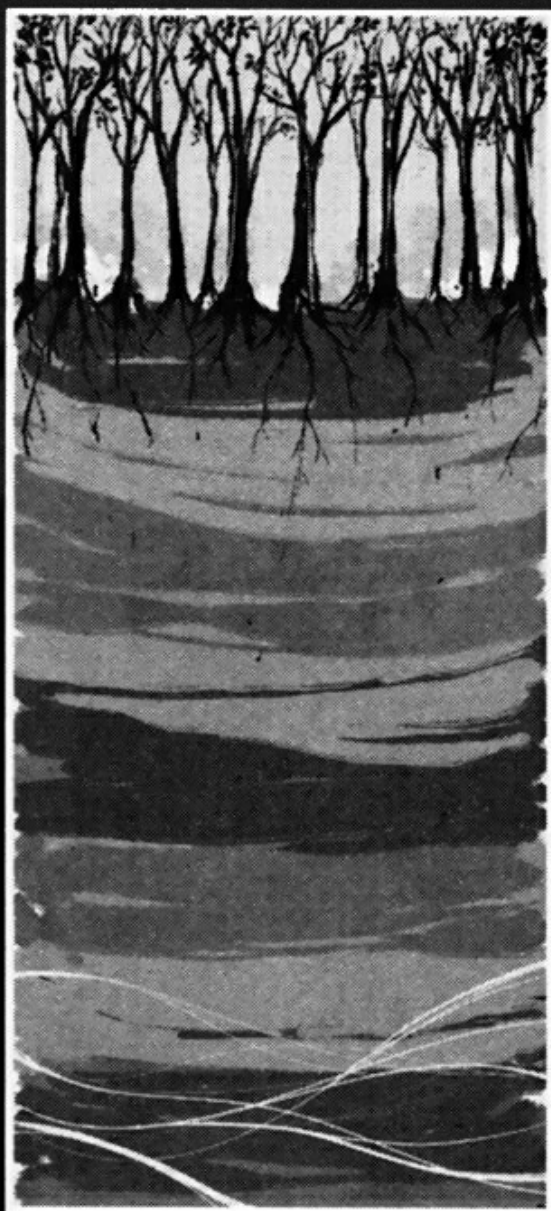
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history

Ley lines



“Eventually, the people thought to regain their divine power and return to the heavens.

But because of the unforgiving environment of Earth, and because they had lost their power, humanity was unable to leave the Divine States. As a result, a war over the land broke out throughout the island.

It was a war fought for power over the land, a war between the descendants of those who had lived in the Divine States during the Former Earth Age and the descendants of those from other countries.

As a solution, people copied the Divine States to a Different Space.

They tried to solve the problem of limited land by making an experimental place, that would be different from Earth’s unforgiving environment.

Because the condition of the Divine States was looked down upon by all the countries of this world, the descendants of these countries, with the exception of those from the Divine States decided to cross to the ‘Harmonic World’ in the Different Space.”

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“Even while continuing to labor, the people who controlled the environmental gods used the ley lines and the environmental gods to create and maintain the ‘Harmonic World’.

They entrusted the tools of control, the Divine Tools, to the people of the Divine States in the Real World and crossed over to the Divine States of the Harmonic World.

However, humanity was still uneasy as to whether or not it would once again be able to ascend to the heavens.

What was then created was the history book of the Former Earth Age, ‘The Testament’.

This was based upon the thinking that were they to recreate from the beginning the history of mankind’s past, they would once again be able to ascend to the heavens.

It could be said that the Testament was a walkthrough to history.

Thus, this ‘Testament’ was created. The Seven Compositions and the Excerpt held within described the old age, that lasted till 0 AD, and the new age thereafter.”

The way to the environmental gods



history

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history

Testament



"A single installment was added to the Testament.

An information concealing spell was appended to it in order to convalesce the rate of the flow of destiny.

Thereafter, no-one could read anything further than one hundred years of the following history.

This was so no-one could attain power by reading ahead.

And so, having received the Testament, the descendants of all the other ocuntries started to recreate history in the Divine States of the Real World and the Divine States of the Harmonic World.

However, a certain grave problem occurred as history was recreated.

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“In one act of the Divine States’ history recreation, the Nanboku-chou War, the Divine Tools were lost.

At last, after centuries, the control of the Harmonic World was lost, and it collapsed.

Breaking apart, the harmonic world fell to the real world, and its fragments fused with reality.

The people of the countries of the Harmonic World invaded the real world.

The Divine States, weary from the Nanboku-chou War, eventually surrendered to all these countries, who had attained the power of a countermeasure against the harsh environment.

However, the complete control of the Divine States by other countries had not occurred in history.

Because the Divine States refused to be controlled both militarily and politically, each country established an academic organization, represented by a school.

They replaced their military and government with an ‘Academy’, and the Divine States came under the provisional control of each country.

In this way, the lord of every country and land ruled together atop the Divine States.

And whilst the Divine States’ Sengoku Period and the Modern Age of the other countries influenced the world, history was recreated as battles between the Academies.



Hexagone Française

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Holy Roman Empire



England

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history



Tres Espana

Tres España

—However, a new uneasiness had started to stir.

The Testament had stopped its renewal of its description of history a hundred years ago, in 1548.



.M .O .P

P.A.ODA

The last description was that of the current year, 1648. The fact that the renewal had stopped meant that destiny had stopped.

In short, the end of the world, the 'Apocalypse', is thought to occur this year."



Свет Россия

Sviet Russia



清

Qing

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School Rules

Article 1

- The Academy is an organization for the sake of peace, development and protection. It keeps the Far East from being subjected and it holds the highest authority wherever it is placed.

Article 4

- The representatives of the Academy will be split in two roles: the chancellor, one who places security foremost, and the student council president, the one who places politics foremost. Below them are the chancellor's officers and the student council.

Article 9

- In regards to the resolution of Academy and inter-Academy problems, only students are able to face fellow students on the same ground.

Prologue: Those Lined Up Before the Horizon

PROLOGUE

"Those Lined Up Before the Horizon"



Whether to be lost.
Or to be exploring.
The reason to keep hold of your heart's compass is something.
Point Allocation (Protagonist)

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Point Allocation (Protagonist)

•

The sky.

A clear morning sky. Beyond the azure floated two pale white moons, and below lay waves of dark green mountains overlapping into the distance.

In the alpine region, the endless sky loomed over the jagged mountain tops.

Divisions in the shape of pillars towered in the sky. Stretching upwards from the earth, these divided segments gave off the appearance of colonnades. Through the way in which the wind and clouds traversing the sky dissipated upon reaching them as if hitting an invisible wall, as well as the division of the vegetation on the ground, those wide yet numerous pillar-like structures flaunted their existence.

The number of segments was immeasurable, their spatial relationship erratic, and their widths too were varied.

The sky, divided in that manner, held three things.

The first was wind. The atmospheric flows of the mountainous region rose, entwined, gave birth to clouds and then faded away.

The second were the waves. Abundant in the sky, glistening waves drifted. Lines not of clouds but of these waves were everywhere, stretching out through the sky outlining the character ‘八’.

Of the three things in the sky, the last was that which traveled between the clouds and created the waves.

Ships.

Leaving behind the sound of their wake eight white ships sailed, navigating between the pillars that divided the sky and traveling past the lumbering mountains.

The Aerial City Ships, carrying towns and natural parks on their surface segments, drew their shadows together as they descended towards the mountains. The shadows of the group of ships, with two ships lined up in the center and three ships lined up to the left and the right, engulfed themselves in one of the gorges stretching multiple kilometers from head to tail.

Each of the ships created waves streaming from the bow into the sky; and carrying the echoes of the break of each wave, they continued on through the heavens.

Breaking the waves while advancing through the skies, each ship was connected to the adjacent ships by many thick ropes. Occasionally when the group of ships changed their path slightly the ropes which connected them would be drawn taut and pulled out.

The names were inscribed at the bows of the eight ships. First, on each of the ships the name “Musashi” was written with black characters. Next to this, the ship-names were unsurprisingly also written in black.

First Starboard: “Shinagawa”

Second Starboard: “Tama”

Third Starboard: “Takao”

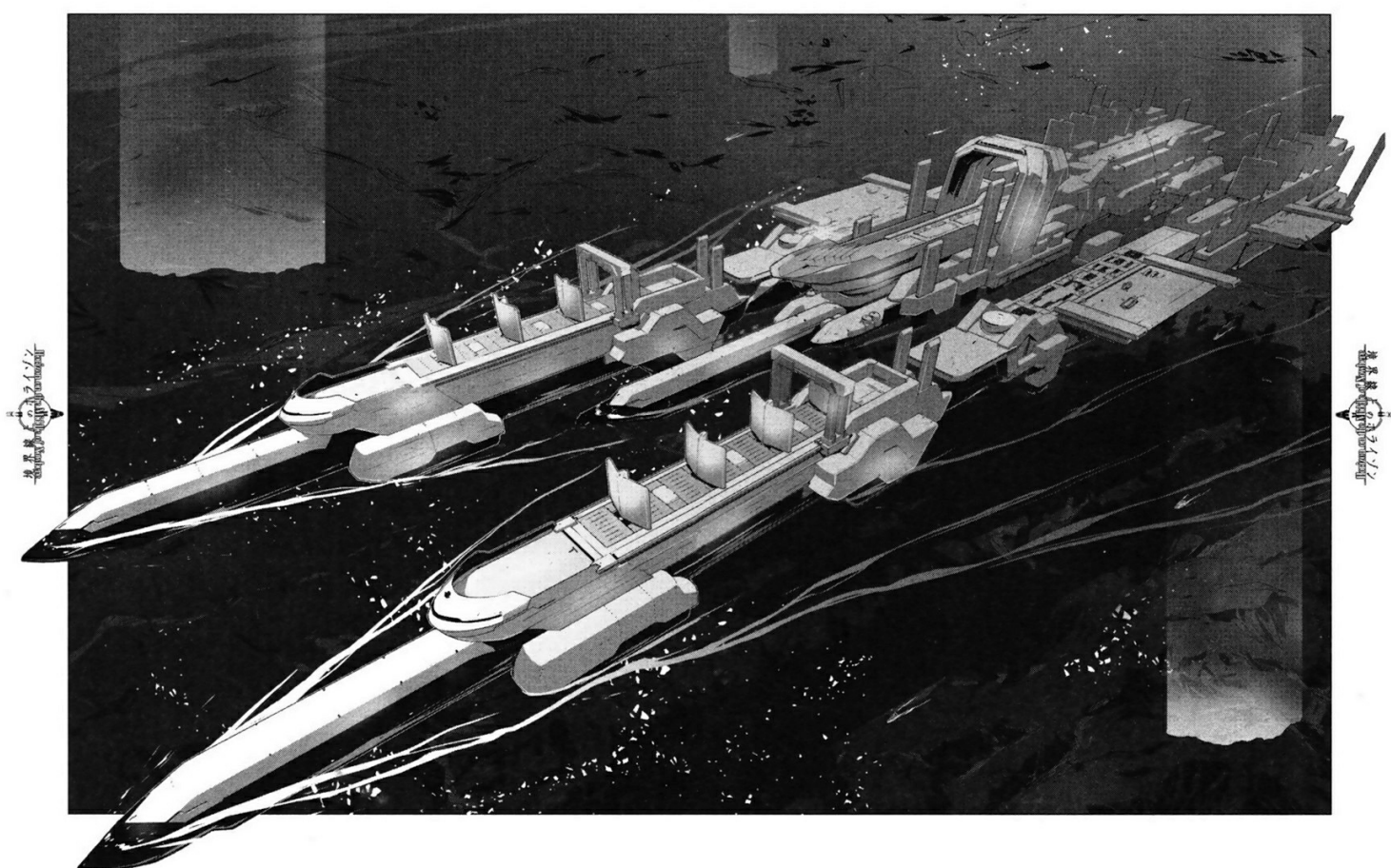
Center Leading: “Musashino”

Center Trailing: “Okutama”

First Port: “Asakusa”

Second Port: “Murayama”

Third Port: “Oume”



機動戦艦ナデシカ

機動戦艦ナデシカ

The formation of these ships was such that the three ships on the left and right acted as outer hulls to the two in the middle. Reaching a total of eight, these ships sailed through the sky.

A sound rang out.

The sound was a voice of song.

From the graveyard on the surface-segment of Okutama's bow, the echoes of that slow voice sang with a trembling rhythm.

“—Let me pass—”

Let me pass, let me pass.

If I follow this narrow path, where will it take me?

This narrow path leads to the gods in heaven

Your opinion is not needed. You cannot pass through here

I have come to celebrate this child's tenth birthday

By dedicating these two talismans

Going may be easy, but returning is frightening

Can I pass despite my fear?

The song traversed the air, eventually disappearing.

In its place, a new resounding note appeared. Entirely separate from the sound of waves from the ship's passage, the consecutive clangor of a bell rang out.

Sounding once, twice, thrice, it continued; a chain of unbroken music. However, the clear note of the bell that told the time was overridden by a broadcasted voice.

“To all citizens: I wish to inform you that in Quasi-Bahamut Class Aerial City Ship—Musashi, it is currently 8:30 according to the bell of Musashi Ariadust Academy. The ship is presently withdrawing from the Sagarmatha Corridor and

sailing southwest. In the afternoon, we will be docking at the main port of Far East Representative State Mikawa. Once we have entered the hospitable atmosphere, Musashi shall be entering stealth flight and will experience a brief interruption in information services. As such, we wish for your cooperation. Over.”

The source of the sound and voice was a structure atop Okutama, which was the central-trailing ship.

Neighboring each other there stood two long, wooden, three-storey buildings. A metal nameplate was hung up by the entrance to the two structures whose bells were ringing. “Musashi Ariadust Academy” was written on the nameplate.

Between the gate and the school building was the schoolyard and a bridge, which crossed overhead. This bridge was part of a path that led to Musashi Ariadust Academy.

The diagonal length of the schoolyard was about 100 meters. The steps of the bridge crossing over the courtyard started from the gate, ascending until they reached a hatch in the second floor of the frontal school building.

As the bell that told the time faded away, the voice of a woman came from above the bridge as if she had been waiting for that moment.

“Okaaaaay.”

The voice, traveling quite far, flew out towards the school building.

“Third Year Plum Class. Is everyone here?”

Several figures stood before Musashi Ariadust Academy, atop the bridge from which the voice had called out.

First, by the door a woman stood proud. She was wearing a black light armor-style jersey. Behind her hair, which was cut short, a single blade was strapped onto her back.

A longsword, painted-white, rested there. Its hilt was crafted of gleaming metal.

The scene the woman was facing consisted of the school building and a group

of youths wearing black and white uniforms; some seemed to be human and some were not. The woman faced them with a smile.

“Then...let’s start the physical education lesson!”

•

Keeping a modest tone, the teacher spoke to the students gathered atop the bridge.

“Now then, the rules are simple.”

She indicated the tip of the group of ships, gesturing towards it with her chin.

“Are you listening? ...Now then, I’m going to go all out and sprint to the yakuza office at the front of Shinagawa to give them a beating; so I hope everyone can follow along. After getting there it’ll be the start of the practical lesson; we clear?”

Hearing the teacher’s words, a collective “Eh?” burst from amidst the group of students.

The teacher ignored their outburst and smiled.

“If you’re late I might just have you do the early morning classroom clean up... and your response? Judge?”

“...Judge.”

In answer, everyone replied with this word, which conveyed their understanding.

As they did a tall boy raised his hand. He was wearing an armband on which the words “Treasurer: Shirojiro Bertoni” were written.

“Oriotorai-sensei... How does physical education relate to Shinagawa’s yakuza? Does it have anything to do with money?”

“Don’t be stupid, Shirojiro. Physical education has to do with exercise, right? And beating people up is an exercise! It’s really quite a serious problem if you can’t grasp a simple analogy like that.”

A figure clad in a female uniform tugged on Shirojiro’s sleeve. The long-haired girl (who was wearing an armband on which the words “Treasurer’s Assistant:

Heidi Augesvarer" were written) spoke thusly, smiling all the while:

"You know, Shiro-kun, Oriotorai-sensei was recently assigned a solitary house up on the surface. But as she was celebrating wildly, her land was bought up and she was sent to the bottom level. This led to her indulging in alcohol; and then she got violent, and then she put a crack in the wall, and then she was seriously reprimanded by the teacher's department... In short, everything after the middle of that story was entirely her fault, but...keeping in mind her original intentions, I'm thinking this is about revenge."

"It's not revenge. It's just that I got kind of irritated, so I'm returning the favor."

"That's the same thing!"

Everyone clamored, but Oriotorai-sensei did not seem to even care.

Taking the longsword and its sheath from her back and into her hands, she clasped it to her side. She then rubbed the emblem of the brand name "IZUMO" which was inlaid on the sheath's surface, before resting her fingers on the hilt which had a slightly twisted design due to IZUMO's unique styling which emphasized the sword's cutting ability.

"Is somebody absent? There's no helping with Miriam Poqou... Besides her, Azuma's finally going to return at noon today; but as for other absentees..."

Hearing the implied question, the group looked around at each others' faces.

Having done this, a golden-haired girl wearing a black triangular hat spoke. She was wearing an armband on which the words "Third Special Duty: Margot Naito" were written. As the six golden wings on her back were swaying in the wind, she said this:

"As far as Nai-chan can see, Seijun and the chancellor aren't here."

In response the girl with black wings whom Naito was hugging, "Fourth Special Duty: Malga Naruze" shook her head.

"Masazumi is going to Tama's Elementary Academy as an instructor, and in the afternoon she's going to accompany President Sakai to Mikawa; so she should have an excused absence for today. As for the chancellor... I don't know

about Toori.”

“Mmm, then is there anybody here who knows what’s going on with our ‘Impossible’ Toori?”

Hearing her ask this, the class turned to look at a single person. Standing further behind and on the steps below, a girl with brown wavy hair folded her arms as her mouth formed a bow-shaped smile.

“Ufu~ Everyone! So you want to hear about my foolish brother Toori that much? Of course you do, don’t you? I mean, he’s Musashi’s chancellor and student council president, isn’t he? Ufu~ ...But I won’t tell you anything!”

“Huh?!” Everyone exclaimed, confused. The girl nodded meaningfully.

“Because around eight in the morning when I woke up, he’d already left!”

“You wake up really late for someone so lively, you know!”

“Ehe~ It’s all right, my make-up was done; so I, Belle Flore Aoi, am making clear just how much composure I have in the morning. But that foolish brother of mine, waking up early and leaving without making my breakfast... Oh how splendid it would be if at his judgement for the afterlife he’s struck by a foul ball ruling by the umpire and drops down to hell! After all, it’s about time the world ends from the Apocalypse!”

“Umm, Kimi-chan?”

At Naito’s call, Kimi turned around. Her eyebrows were slightly raised.

“Margot...not that name, you know? Aoi Kimi...a name like that sounds just like ‘raw yolk’, so it’s like the kind of name you’d give to something your dog ate and excreted. With that in mind call me Belle Flore, alright?”

“Nai-chan is just wondering, but...wasn’t it Josephine three days ago?”

“Nakamura-san who lives three houses over named her dog Josephine, so it isn’t Josephine; at least, not anymore! With the enjoyment of an old person, that woman has a cute hobby of attaching a collar with long and soft-looking fur to that animal just like a little girl and training it while it’s nude! It’s frustrating just thinking about it; but next time she’ll let me give it a hug, you know!? Wait a moment, aren’t I the underdog like this!?”

“I wonder~”

Naito said, though she had been grabbed by the collar and was being shaken back and forth by Kimi.

As this was going on, Oriotorai was silently adding check-marks to the attendance record she had taken out from her jersey’s bosom.

“Then, Toori is...late and unexcused...? Even though he’s the student council president and chancellor...? This won’t do at all...”

Hearing her speak, everyone smiled helplessly. Some voices went, “W-well...”

Oriotorai turned to face the class as they began to make excuses on his behalf, responding with a wry smile.

“Well, yeah. It’d be dangerous if Musashi’s chancellor were to get a hold of himself... There’s a reason for him being like that, after all.”

After sweeping her gaze about and looking around her, she spoke.

“Well, this is troublesome. Even though the Divine States below us used to be ours, it’s now under the provisional rule of the other countries; and the former residents are being chased into the Far East residency area... I can’t believe that all that’s left under the Divine States’ control is this ship, Musashi.”

•

Oriotorai slowly uttered these words, looking up towards the sky.

“...the Harmonic Divine States, which fell from the Harmonic World in the ‘Destruction of the Harmonic World’ roughly a hundred and sixty years ago, merged with the Divine States leaving cracks in between. After the ‘Harmonic Unification War’, this unified territory was in effect completely occupied by the countries that had come from the Harmonic Divine States; and the name of our island, the ‘Divine States’, was even changed to the name ‘Far East’.”

Oriotorai looked up at the clouds drifting through the sky, which was dotted with numerous pillar-shaped spaces like holes in a piece of cloth. Listening to her speak, the class tensed slightly.

However, Oriotorai continued to pour out a stream of words.

“At the time there was a treaty which stated that the countries of the Harmonic Divine States could not take military or political control. With this in mind, these countries established the Union of the Testament. They formed an academic institution, the Academy, which in turn acts as a military and governmental facility. Using this loophole they took our land. That’s why the principal countries currently hold the Academy as the most important governmental and military facility under the regulations of the Testament Union. In this way, they provisionally occupied the Far East dividing it amongst themselves. Making use of the monarchs who had been placed under their control, they reenacted the original war over the land as a battle between the students of the different Academies.”

This was not all.

“Kept separate from the Far East residency area which was prepared by the provisionally controlled territories and countries on the ground, Musashi is the only acknowledged territory of the Far East. Even so, we’re still under the Testament Union’s surveillance. Anyway, as for the Far East Academy’s chancellor and student council president...”

She meant to continue, but she was interrupted.



Aoi Kimi



Margot Naito

Malga Naruze



Oriotorai Makiko

“They picked the least powerful and the least able person from our Academy to fulfill that role. Someone like Toori. They even went as far as to give him a nickname like ‘Impossible’.

“Their reasoning for doing this was: ‘The fact that a powerful leader is not required is proof that the Far East is peaceful.’ ”

Hurling those words out was a boy wearing glasses. He was wearing an armband on which the words “Secretary: Neshinbara Toussaint” were written.

Closing a torii-gate signframe whose display had been opened up in the air, he went on.

“It’s been like this for a hundred and sixty years. Because the Far East has avoided being targeted by the assorted nations by citing its mistakes as an excuse, we’ve always kept our heads down, cooperated, and paid our way. As such, even though we’ve become the Far East’s base of operations our power’s in severe disarray because we are always moving. In other words, Musashi can’t do anything.

“In any case, even though the students of the other countries don’t have an upper-age limit, the Far East’s students graduate at 18...and if you’re above that age, you can’t participate in the government or military anymore.

“It’s often said in the Far East that the students are the privileged class.

“And the countries of the Testament Union have a saying: ‘Those who are not students are hardly people,’ right?”

Hearing Neshinbara speak so venomously, voices of protest emerged from the class. A boy in the middle brought some packet snacks to his mouth. He was wearing a nametag on which the name “Ohiroshiki” was written.

“I can’t help but wonder, isn’t saying something like that rather dangerous?”

“It’s all right.”

Neshinbara said.

“The Testament Union’s gods of war fly around the ship to observe us, but they don’t have the time to pick up on our voices one by one. Also we’re about to enter into Mikawa which is governed by the ruler of the Far East and the

owner of Musashi, Lord Matsudaira Motonobu. Mikawa's under the Testament Union's observation; but they've half-seceded from the Testament Union and they've allied with P.A. Oda, who're openly hostile towards the Testament Union... So while we're around Mikawa, the Testament Union can't afford to move carelessly. There's nothing to worry about."

"Ehhhh, you're so mature. But this time it's not just Tres España who're observing Mikawa; it's said that K.P.A. Italia's Pope Chancellor has come to check on a new model of his armament of mass destruction, the Logismoí Óplo. Please have a little care...just a little is fine, though."

Oriotorai said, the corner of her mouth curved into a smile. Facing her, Neshinbara spread his arms outward exaggeratedly and bowed deeply. Seeing this, everyone breathed in...

"But, well..." Oriotorai muttered softly. A smile on her face, she cocked her head.

"This country's been suppressed in this way, but...do you all know your plans for the future?"

Hearing her ask this, everyone remained silent.

Oriotorai did not ask any further, as if the silence itself was an answer.

...They're all third years already.

Around this time next year, they'll probably be somewhere that'll answer that question for me.

"The world's getting pretty noisy nowadays. The history book of prophecy, the Testament, hasn't been completely reenacted; and with the end of its descriptions coming up with the 'Peace of Westphalia', it's being said that we're probably facing the Apocalypse in which the world will end. Everyone knows that the ley lines are riddled with chaos, and phenomena are occurring everywhere... Things like the M.H.R.R.'s 'Pied Piper Disappearances' or Sviet Rus' 'Null Lands'."

The students who were battle-able spell users as well as the students of certain lineages hardened their expressions. There had been incidents where they had been deployed to exorcise monsters born from the disturbance of the

ley lines, and they had detailed information concerning these phenomena.

Everyone lived a normal everyday-life, but occasionally a question that set them off would find its way among them.

This was the question.

“ ‘If the world is to end this year, what will our way forward be?’ ...right?”

As she said this, Oriotorai re-stopped the parts fixing the hilt to the base of the sheath.

“Well, it’s troublesome to think about; but things’ll be fine if we keep gathering points. We’ll eventually know what’ll happen to the world, so until then do what you want.”

“...You feel that way too, Miss? ‘It’s troublesome that we’re being suppressed, but do what you see fit.’ ”

A puzzled expression on her face, Naruze inquired this of Oriotorai. Listening to her question, Oriotorai looked at the sky.

“That’s right... Well...”

Oriotorai smiled slightly; and after a little while, she spoke again.

“Personally, I’m thinking about how I once thought of dying. That’s something from a while ago, though.”

Returning her gaze to the class which stood before her, Oriotorai’s smile grew a little wider.

...Well, these kids will understand the pain of being in that place.

She nodded to herself before lowering her stance.

“Well then.”

She looked at those who had reacted instantly upon seeing her movements.

“Alright then; if you have skills in battle, you’re going to have to come with me. So follow me; and even if just a little, be ready to die. The rules are simple: if you’re able to hit me with an attack before I reach the office...”

She continued.

“I’ll give you five more attendance checks. Do you understand? You’ll be able to skip class five times.”

Hearing these last few words, the expression on the class’s faces shifted.

Having heard these two words, “five times”, everyone whispered to each other.

“In other words, we’ll be able to skip five times in the morning...? If that’s the case...”

The class’s hopes were on the rise.

A boy raised his hand to draw Oriotorai’s attention. He was wearing an armband on which the words “First Special Duty: Tenzou Crossunite” were written. His hat pulled low such that it covered his eyes, he spoke together with the flying half-dragon “Second Special Duty: Kiyonari Urquiaga” who stood next to him.

“Miss, having the attack ‘hit’ and not ‘graze’ should be fine, should it not?”

“Well, well, the battle-types are thorough aren’t they? But yes; there’s nothing particularly wrong with that, you know? I don’t care about your methods either.”

Hearing this, Urquiaga folded his arms. With his dragon-eyes, he looked down to Tenzou.

“Did you hear that? This female teacher said that it’s fine no matter what we do, Tenzou. Is it fine if I use my power of imagination?”

“Judge. I heard her too. But, putting aside the story Auge-dono told us earlier, I ‘nearly’ touched that ‘female teacher’s’ butt the other day; and she managed to start a disturbance that removed the floor of the residential area all by herself.”

“Hmph. Tenzou, even when faced with reality the power of imagination is unmatched. That a ninja like you has not noticed that is regretful.”

“I understand. Then, um, Oriotorai-sensei, no matter where we touch or grope your parts we won’t have points deducted, right? Rather than that, we should get something like bonus points for...specific areas.”

“Ahaha, you two want to die before the lesson even starts, right?”

Saying those words with her eyes narrowed, Oriotorai stuck her tongue out.

“...Well then.”

“Eh?”

Faster than anyone could react, Oriotorai jumped.

It was a backwards leap. Oriotorai jumped, sending her figure in its black jersey flying horizontally over the stairs that went down from the bridge and all the way to the tip of Okutama.

Her destination was the path below the stairs, which exited the second schoolyard and headed towards the bow. This was the road that led to starboard, passing through the middle of the natural gardens which split to the left and right due to the large wind tunnels used for air flow within the ship.

...The central-starboard passage, known as “Remorse Way”.

Ten years ago, the road was given this name after Musashi’s Great Renovation.

Oriotorai knew why people had started calling it this name.

There was a stone plate in one of the shoulders on the right of the road, close to the entrance of the passage.

It was a stone plate decorated with flowers, about 50 centimeters in height. One sentence was engraved onto its surface:

—1638 All those who reside in Musashi pray for the girl Horizon A’s happiness in her next life.

“Horizon, huh? For those kids, that’s definitely the name that became the beginning of everything...”

As she muttered, she looked towards the bridge. From her perspective it was rotating upwards at a furious pace. For an instant she caught sight of her class. Everyone atop the bridge had hesitated for an instant, unable to react.

Naive. If there were a cannon strike from an opposing battleship they would have died.

Were they aware of this?

Voices were spilling out from the bridge, audibly the start of a single word.

“...Sh—”

Oriotorai heard their voices.

They had most likely started to say the word “shit”. Were they regretful? It’d be fine if they were.

...Having been outwitted, they’d have to be.

So I thought.

I thought of the current Musashi’s chancellor’s officers and the members of the student council.

“Musashi Ariadust Academy: Student Representative Layout”

Chancellor’s Officers:

- Chancellor:** Aoi Toori
- Vice Chancellor:** N/A
- 1st Special Duty (Intelligence):** Tenzou Crossunite
- 2nd Special Duty (Judgment):** Kiyonari Urquiaga
- 3rd Special Duty (Field Operation):** Margot Naito
- 4th Special Duty (Field Operation):** Malga Naruze
- 5th Special Duty (Field Operation):** Nate Mitotsudaira
- 6th Special Duty (Field Operation):** Naomasa

Student Council:

- President:** Aoi Toori

- Vice President:** Honda Masazumi
- Treasurer:** Shirojiro Bertoni
- Treasurer's Assistant:** Heidi Augesvarer
- Secretary:** Toussaint Neshinbara

...There were people who weren't here, or simply absent. Yet in general, all things strange had been gathered before her.

And they weren't the only ones. They were all brimming with great things.

Interesting, she thought, smiling. And as she smiled, the students leaped from atop the bridge.

"...Chase her!!"

•

Everyone currently on the decks of all the ships could hear the cacophony.

Gunshots, the clashing of swords, and the sound of metal and destruction reached them from the central-trailing ship—Okutama.

"They're moving through 'Remorse Way', heading to the bow!"

The din continued to move; and from the point of view of the watchmen who kept watch for danger from every ship, the source of the sound was traveling from the starboard of Okutama to the second starboard ship—Tama.

Because of this, the residents of the main deck on the port side of Okutama heaved a sigh of relief and started to prepare for the afternoon's work; and the residents of the third starboard ship—Takao—gave three cheers from the front edge of the deck where they could be seen by the people of the second starboard ship—Tama.

Seeing this, Tama's residents were firing curse and attack spells attempting to hit the people shouting "Banzai!" on Takao.

"We're screwed!"

With these simple thoughts in mind the shopkeepers boarded up the

entrances to their stores, closing the shutters in an effort to protect the shops. Depending on the shop in question, there were some protective barriers that had been erected using a spell.

Though all this was going on, a section of the shopping district remained open.

“Well, this happens all the time... I’m just praying that they don’t go down this route. If they do though, I’m going to have a breakdown.”

“Well, we played around like this too. In fact, so did the generation before us. If this continues to happen, it’ll be Musashi’s prided tradition!”

Thinking this, the shopkeepers gathered. They hid their invoices away in the darkest corners of the deepest counters, dealing with the coming problems by running away.

Having done this, they started to gamble. They were betting on the winner of the day’s lesson.

“...Even so, that teacher is apocalyptically strong in athletics. She’s a tester for IZUMO, isn’t she?”

“Judge, and they’re also without a vice chancellor of the chancellor’s officers so they’re missing a spearhead to their attacks.”

“Putting that aside, think about how all the all-on-one’s have gone. They haven’t been able to hit her. Not even once. Well...they almost got her last round...that was just a shame.”

“Mmmm,” the shopkeepers mumbled. As the source of the tumult continued its approach from Okutama, each of them wrote their choice on a piece of note paper and handed it to the bookkeeper.

Many gatherings of that kind had sprung to life within the town.

But in the center of the town a store stayed open, utterly still in this bustle of activity.

It was a café on the second starboard ship, tucked into an alley near the center-point of Tama’s surface.

Two signs were set up in front of the bakery. One had the words “shopkeeper

making a delivery”, and the other had the words “open for business”.

Another sign hung above the door, a sign painted with the name, “Blue Thunder”.

There were no customers in the shop, but a silhouette stood behind the counter. This silhouette faced the street, her gaze forming a perpendicular angle with the lines of the road.

It was a white-haired female doll, just about the size of a human. Her model had skin that was principally constructed of biological parts, all synthesized from the same constituents as human flesh. The majority of her joints were encased in black elastic composites.

Occasionally, her two shoulders and chest would rise and fall as she breathed. She was a doll that moved autonomously, an automaton.

•

Behind the counter of “Blue Thunder” the female automaton stood there in an apron, with her head lowered slightly. She placed baked bread upon the shelf behind her; she didn’t spare the road a glance.

However, her face suddenly turned towards the back of the store. An oven used for baking bread stood there, and above it a kitchen counter which held a stove that used the excess heat.

The automaton moved her gaze towards the kitchen counter and the cooking equipment next to it.

Continuing to face that direction, she stopped moving as if she had taken interest.

“__”

From the path, the numerous footfalls of a group walking briskly and the sound of their voices could be heard.

“—We’ve got to hurry up and get back, it looks like they’re comin’ this way. The town carpenter won’t be able to stop laughing.”

“If we’re being worked at a pace where we die from overworking, we’re not

going to have the opportunity to use our money even if we get paid, y'know. But at your place, that part-time working automaton... P-01s was it? Can't it be sensible and close the shop?"

"We're not gonna close, ya know. I'm a former samurai, so closin' shop durin' business hours is kinda embarrassin'. That child understands this too. Even at this kinda time, she's waitin' for people comin' to eat their breakfast."

The approaching voice said.

"All of you, it still seems rare to me; but that child's been comin' to this shop every mornin' for a year, and I'm renowned for openin' early in da mornin'. I was pretty surprised when that child stood outside our door; and outside of da name P-01s she didn't know anythin', and she had no shelter so it was pretty troublin', but well... I'm glad I hired her. She's got spirit. Anyway, recently I haven't even had to check da morning's repertoire."

"Spirit doesn't have anythin' to do with an automaton, right? They don't have things like feelings, after all..."

At that point, the voices stopped. This was because the row of figures had come to the front of the store.

Within the crowd a middle-aged woman, the owner of the store, turned to a few of the people of the crowd as they continued to pass by. A smile hovered at the corner of her mouth.

"She's my pride and joy. Now I've even started ta think about my own repertoire. Even if I put that on da menu in da future, I won't be servin' that to any noisy people, y'know?"

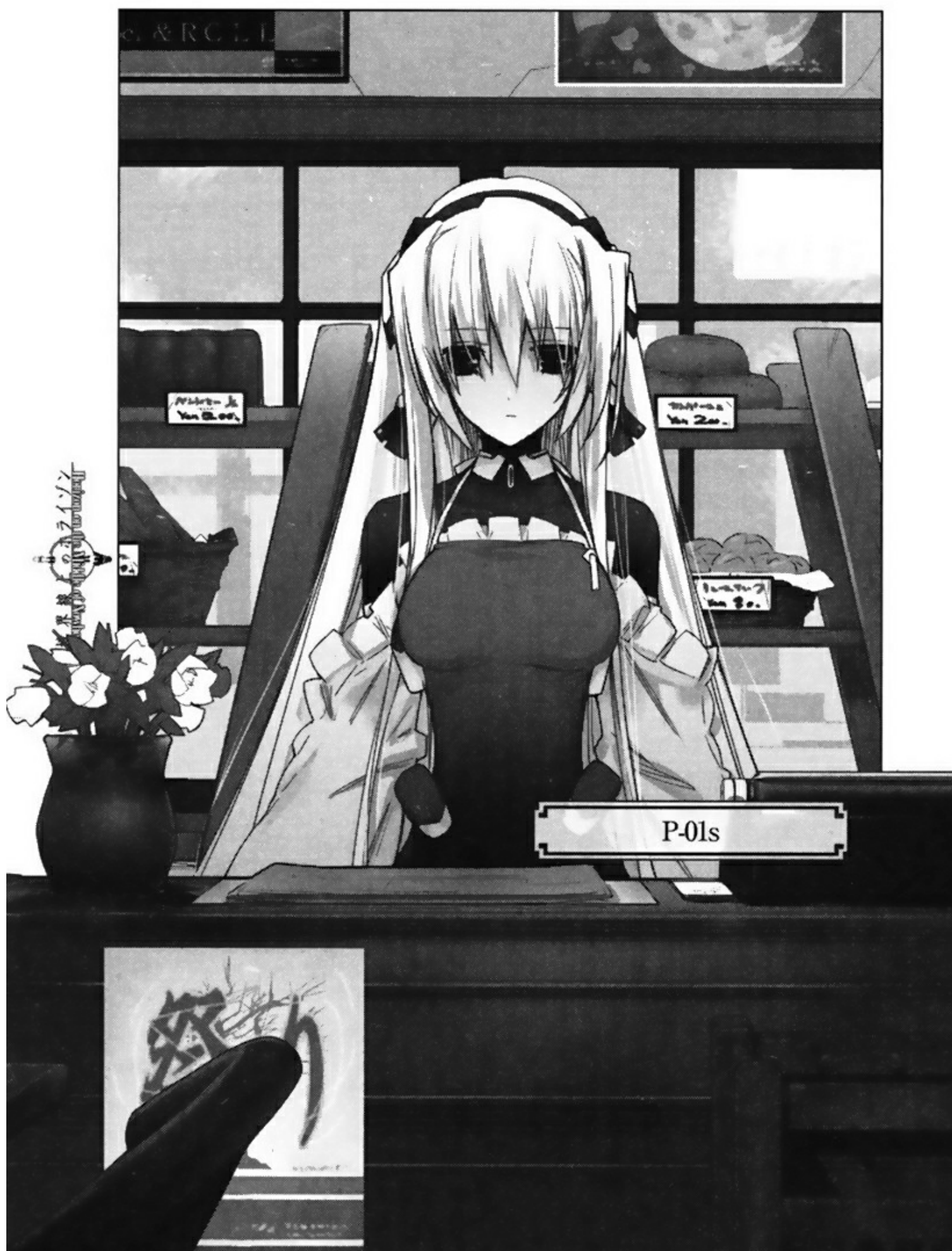
"Judge, that'd be horrible."

Still laughing, the men and women left. The female shopkeeper entered the shadow of the store.

"Really, even though workers are supposed t'be equal. It's not a big deal, right P-01s?"

Hearing her question, the automaton returned her gaze and a nod.

The shopkeeper across from her placed her hands on her hips and sighed.



“Well, don’t worry about the noise. Then... I won’t be closin’ da store, but I’ll have ta bring in the sign out in front and throw out da water. When the din’s all over and I can take a breath, you can head home. You can take as much of the baked bread as ya want. Why don’t ya bake it a little more in the oven?”

With that said, the automaton nodded slightly.

Her gaze moved slightly, but not to look away from the shopkeeper.

“The kitchen?”

Having been asked this, the automaton returned her gaze after a short while and nodded.

In response, the shopkeeper put a hand to her hips and sighed.

“You memorized my repertoire; so when ya think about what ta make yerself, it was always somethin’ plain, and there were a lot of failures, but...well, the basics’re important.”

“—Judge.”

The automaton said softly. She continued to speak with an emotionless voice.

“To increase the repeatability of Shopkeeper-sama’s work, around one year is needed. Speaking about the current situation, other than being asked ‘Didn’t you put your heart into it?’ by the customers, there are no problems. Currently, P-01s is in the midst of researching her original breakfast; but as a result of the desired product being unclear, P-01s is in the midst of pondering to which level she should investigate.”

“If that’s the case, then just do it ’till yer satisfied. The depths of egg fryin’ are pretty deep after all.”

The shopkeeper laughed a little. Sticking her hand out towards the automaton’s head, she patted it as if mussing her hair.

“A child who does their work seriously is a good child... When yer done, make one portion just like we always did in practice. Yer an automaton, but yer type needs food after all.”

“Judge,” the automaton nodded.

Immediately after, a voice tinged with nervousness could be heard from the stern of the ship.

“Th-they’ve finally come...”

•

The second starboard ship—Tama—had a town of stone and a natural garden on its surface.

Because the “Tourist Destination — Tama” signposts standing everywhere in town displayed this message in foreign languages, there were many European faces amongst the crowds peering out at the clamor from the windows. All of those who lived on the surface below had turned their gazes upwards. They stared, all eyes reaching out to look over the wooden, thatch, and stone roofs of varying heights.

There, at a place which could be said to be above their heads, the mayhem ran.

The noise cut through them without warning.

Firstly, a cluster of light burst forth from above a commercial street at the port-side.

“...?”

Everyone peering out from inside their houses saw a storm of bullets, arrows of light, and an attack that looked like a wall of linked lasers.

The stationery shop’s owner muttered while closing the armored door to his shop.

“Rapidly firing unblessed shots, huh? They’re all using the same kind of spell. On the roofs where there’s a direct line to the target, then that’s more than enough and there’s no wastage either...that is, if they were trying to hit a normal opponent.”

The opponent. Chased by the barrage of flying light, the silhouette of their opponent ran atop the rooftops.

It was a woman. She had readied her sword before her chest as she ran, wielding her sheath in her other hand.

“...!”

She took the chasing light and bullets head on, cutting them out of the air and deflecting them away.

She continued to run on the roof even as she was facing backwards. Despite this, she sprinted in a special manner. Because she was focusing on stepping onto support pillars or building rafters and jumping off them, she did not accidentally send any debris flying.

This was not all.

She was dodging as she moved. She continued to evade as she dealt with the attacks flying at her. The roofs of the town's central shopping street were already tens of meters in length, but her speed as she sprinted did not fall in the slightest. It even seemed that she was increasing her speed each time she was attacked.

The people chasing her were also going all out. One of them was using their teammates' fire to hide and take cover, directly attacking the woman with a longsword. Some of them traveled a straight line across the rooftops, cooperating with the ranged team behind them. And finally the last few circled around the eaves of the first floor, showing themselves and serving to distract the woman from the shots coming from behind.

However, all of their attacks were deflected and crushed by her sheath and spinning hilt.

“...Hup!”

There were also those who had been blown away by kicks.

Because of the whirl of speed and the multiple attacks, not to mention the sound, the dodging and the parrying, the wind howled with a violent ardor.

The resonating sound of clashing metal set the windows of the houses shaking. From time to time an especially vicious attack would crash through the air, making it rumble like thunder.

The tremors shook the houses' pillars; and even the ground was made to quake.

The adornments were all the color of light. The refracted light turned to spray and scattered in each and every direction, the white fragments tearing through the air.

Everything drove past.

Yet even though the sound and speed and light took on the Doppler effect as they distanced themselves, they did not lose their power.

Suddenly, the woman with the longsword called out:

“Hey! Adele and Hassan got knocked out!”

At her voice’s destination two figures had fallen atop the shopping street’s thatched roofs.

There were two people who had fallen face-flat in a ‘大’ position, their breathing erratic: A girl with glasses who held a white spear with a blunted tip, and a boy with a turban wrapped about his head.

The boy with glasses who was a part of the group running along the rooftops spoke:

“Itoken-kun! Go with Nenji-kun to rescue them!”

As he spoke these words a figure flew out from the midst of the group. He just looked like a nude man with a muscular body; but the black bat wings on his back were the proof of his status as a member of the Nightmare Races: a spiritual being. He was an incubus. The bald man raised his hand.

“...Good morning! I’m not just some weird guy! I am called Itou Kenji, an incubus of perversity! My apologies for this impoliteness, everyone!”

Everyone passing ahead flashed him half a glance, but they paid him no mind.

A hemispherical object about a meter in diameter separated from the group, exiting from in between them. The object was in fact a scarlet colored, translucent sticky body. Black sensory parts were stuck to the upper portion of its front, forming eyebrows, eyes, and a mouth.

It chased after Itoken, who was moving forward on his tiptoes with one hand on his waist, approaching the two people who had fallen on the opposite roof. Itoken raised his hand, waving to the creature who was coming up alongside

him.

“Hey! Nenji-kun, you look as beautiful and lively as ever today, with your stickiness and transparency! You’re just so sticky!”

The sticky-bodied Nenji said, raising his sensory organ eyebrows:

“Mm. This time, we’re supposed to save someone aren’t we? If so, then this is my spec—”

Nenji was stepped on by the girl with the nametag “Aoi Kimi”. She was slower than the others, and had come running from the back.

“Ah.”

Ahead, chasing after Oriotorai were the close combat specialists and point-blank marksmanship specialists. Among the spell users who trailed behind, there were many who weren’t athletic. As such, they were slow. There were figures other than Kimi who could be seen; but all of them were heading past, Kimi included.

“Ufufu~, I’m sorry, Nenji! I’m really sorry. Yes, I’m serious! I’m always serious, you know!!”

A girl who was running down the street by herself shouted at Kimi, who had raised her voice at Nenji. She shook her voluminous silver hair.

“Kimi, please be a little more sincere when you apologize. Ladies sho—”

“Ehehe~, you scolding demon girl. But still, Mitotsudaira, why are you running on the ground? Shouldn’t you just go ‘smash’ with those chains you always use?”

“This area is my territory, you know!? You’re rampaging throughout... Really!”

“My, my, the female knight who can’t defeat our teacher is barking like a wolf! You’re like a heavy-tank class after all.”

Kimi’s voice and Mitotsudaira’s retort were immediately lost in the distance because of the Doppler effect. Left behind them was Itoken, who was raising his hand 90 degrees to wave to everybody; and Nenji, who was splattered all over the rooftop.

When Itoken (who was waving his hand to everybody) looked at Nenji, the splattered scarlet colored stickiness was slowly crawling and gathering back together. Telepathy, interrupting at intervals, spoke in Nenji's voice:

"He, hehe, that was pretty dangerous..."

"Nenji-kun! You seem like a man with a lot of spirit; but if we compare this to a game you're a slime with nothing but three hit points, so you can't be reckless, you know!?"

"Mmmm, I had taken a tight defensive position, though..."

"Defensive?"

"Like this..."

The reformed Nenji showed his defensive posture...

After a little while, Itoken (who had knelt down) placed his hand on what seemed to be Nenji's shoulders.

"Yeah," Nenji muttered. "There's always tomorrow..."

A voice resounded from the other side of the row of rooftops, near the bow.

Everyone who was chasing after Oriotorai had set something up.

•

The people who had set something up were the close combat specialists who made up the vanguard.

The location was at Tama's bow on a roof in the business area, which was at a place slightly removed from one of the rows of houses in the residential area. To the left and right of the roof, tall buildings of major businesses lined up.

That was their aim. If the walls on the left and right were tall enough, then they would be able to restrict the space she had to dodge left and right.

While sprinting through the valley-like roof of one structure and passing the walls of buildings left and right, everyone thought this:

They had to hurry.

This was because they were just about to finish running through the second

starboard ship—Tama.

If they exited the area they were running through now, the business area where the industries reside, they would be jumping off of the bow and towards the outside.

Outside the ship, on the other side of the bow would be the first starboard ship's—Shinagawa's—stern. The upper section of Shinagawa is the cargo area; so all that was there were wooden large-scale cargo containers, all lined up. Their destination was the yakuza office in a small residential area, which was situated at the deck by the bow. The road there was made up of the roof of the cargo containers. It was a completely flat area, with no hint of an obstacle.

If they entered Shinagawa, chasing her would become difficult.

“Therefore...”

What everybody thought after those words was the same.

“It's about time we bring the fight to her.”

And, the first to move was him.

“I will go...!”

In the midst of running, Tenzou shouted, issuing his challenge.

Oriotorai whistled shortly in response.

“I thought that it would be you to come first.”

Hearing her voice, Tenzou gave a short answer.

“Judge!”

•

The running Tenzou thought this:

...Indeed, this is my area of expertise!

Oriotorai is currently sprinting in a straight line over the rooftops, which has bad footing. Vaulting over chimneys, things sticking out of the roof and various other structures, her speed did not drop in the slightest even as she flew over the rooftops.

Faced with that, I cannot do the same. A woman's speed drops when she jumps over an obstacle; but if a man tries to speed up while doing so, his feet will be caught by the unsteady roof.

However, I am a ninja. I chose to practice moving through treacherous roads during our lessons; and when Musashi entered port in a mountainous territory, I was trained to run across mountains in addition to survival training.

I knew that I would be the first to catch up to Oriotorai in this kind of situation. I have to lower her speed here, or she will gain an irreversible advantage.

Therefore, I must hasten forth.

Simple slashes of the sword have already been deflected...even gunshots have been sliced out of the air. If I am to strike, it will have to be a serious blow.

The ninja who specializes in treacherous roads follows a substyle from the school rules created by the English.

“Battle type (Style): Close-quarter-combat ninjutsu user (Ninja Forcer), Tenzou—!”

“Hey now, when a ninja starts shouting, what's wrong with the world?”

I don't care.

“Take this!”

As he shouted, Tenzou increased his speed. The distance from him to the running Oriotorai was roughly fifteen meters. On the roof between them, Tenzou ran in a low posture as if he was scaling a wall.

He went. He approached her.

Oriotorai's weapon is a longsword. It's not a weapon that's made to attack in a position where one is running backwards. No matter the circumstances, it is especially difficult for long objects to attack low places. Because the sword's trajectory is curved, it cannot reach low places. If she tries to have it reach a low position, drop her waist and bend forward, her sword will hit the roof, and in that position she will no longer be able to run backwards.

Therefore to move in a way so as to counter the use of a longsword, I have to take a low position.

Before his eyes, Oriotorai drew the longsword on her back with her right hand, but it was still in its sheath. As might be expected, it seemed that she did not want to smash the naked blade into her students.

She's a good teacher, Tenzou thought.

She occasionally causes violent incidents, but she will not attack me. Someone who keeps things safe is a good teacher. Don't ask me if she isn't actually like that, though.

In any case, Tenzou calculated their speeds. He thought of the current speed of approach and the speed at which Oriotorai would smash him with her sword.

The trajectory, the position and distance came together instantaneously.

...Because I'm low...

His thoughts screamed a warning signal.

...!?

My speed is more than enough. My method of shortening the distance and the number of steps I'm taking are optimal. I can hammer in an attack while standing up. But, after that...

...I can't. I can't block the combination that's already headed my way...!

Just before, when she placed her hand on the longsword's hilt, she had started a series of movements. As she stretched her right arm upward, her right knee had been raised. In the midst of her running movements, it was a movement that nearly escaped his eyes; but she appeared to slide her right butt forward, pulling her waist in so she could move into the next movement.

He could predict it.

Oriotorai's next movement will bring her outstretched right foot downward, as if pounding with a hammer. At the same time, she will swing her longsword down into me. However with her right foot, which will have been drilled into the roof, she will forcefully jump backward. Before the longsword can strike the roof, Oriotorai will perform a large bound backwards.

The conclusion: Unable to dodge the blow, Tenzou will be smashed from above becoming a '大' on the ground. If things go poorly, he will be buried in

the straw of the roof.

An instant. Oriotorai's longsword burst up in an upward-arc.

It came. Therefore Tenzou shouted:

"Go, Uqui-dono!"

"Yeah...!"

This response came from above. A shadow flitted down towards the area above Oriotorai, who had already swung her sword.

The shadow was large, and it had two horns.

The half-dragon Urquiaga had jumped from the roof of the adjacent building.

•

"...Heh!"

Oriotorai raised a voice of admiration.

I see, she thought. When Tenzou darted in first, he shouted his self-introduction to divert my attention away from Urquiaga who was climbing the wall next to him.

...It was a feint.

This combination was important. "It is essential to think of a strategy when fighting against an opponent who cannot be beaten with brute force." A teacher must impart this knowledge to her students.

They also have to be taught that there are opponents that will not be defeated with a small feint.

"...!"

Therefore, Oriotorai moved.

•

Urquiaga, flying in towards the area above Oriotorai's head, was in the middle of a movement that spanned but an instant.

I am a flying half-dragon. I can accelerate and fly for short periods because of my wings. Therefore, after Tenzou jumped in I kept my body low and flew to the

roof of the adjacent houses from behind the others. From there I jumped to the roof above the tall walls in one motion.

My attack is a power dive from outside Oriotorai's field of vision.

My weapons are my own two hands. My half-dragon arms are wrapped in scales and shell. Purely because of this, they can be used as striking weapons. Though there are several pieces of equipment attached to my waist, I will not use them.

Bringing her longsword down, Oriotorai spoke in a native language that could be processed at high speed.

“You’re not gonna use the things on your waist!?”

“The Inquisition starter kit isn’t meant to be wielded against those who aren’t heretics of the Tsirhc religion!!”

Urquiaga’s family descended from a line of Tres España inquisitors. They had been well established locally, but they were no longer able to support themselves because of over-hunting. Also, the history recreation of the Protestant Reformation had started in his grandparents’ generation; so they closed shop and came to Musashi. Now his parents were making and selling bedclothes in Oume’s third underground floor. Custom-made beds had become part of his family’s repertoire, and had become popular amongst a portion of people. The type of people who would say: “The restraints should be tight.”

Therefore Urquiaga also thought that he wanted to perform the job that passed his ancestors’ techniques down until now, like his parents. He chose to take Catholic Inquisition classes in the afternoon.

Because of this, he always kept equipment suited for that purpose on his person. Those were tools for interrogation, for fighting with people who gazed with hostility upon the Inquisition.

They were weapons with which he performed his duties.

However, this was not the time to use these particular tools.

This was because heretics and people of different faiths were different. Heretics were people who were of the Tsirhc religion, which was synonymous

to the Catholics.

...However, they twisted the teachings of the Tsirhc religion and spread them. In other words, people who could not be saved.

On the contrary, people of different faiths were people who were not of the Tsirhc religion but were of another one; but because of that...

...They were people who could probably be saved were they to know the true teachings.

Oriotorai being a resident of Musashi had a western name. However, other than her eyes being blue her appearance and way of life was as a person of Musashi. Her religion was Shinto, so she comes under the category of “people of different faith”. Therefore...

“I cannot punch a Musician of Shinto as an Inquisitor! As such, I shall deal you a personal strike!”

“That’s impossible!”

Those words came.

...Impossible!?

Hearing this line, a question danced through Urquiaga’s mind.

Oriotorai is swinging her sword right now. Her right hand already passed by under me, caught up in a one-handed strike.

It was close. The timing to strike is to drift downwards, right behind the passage of her sword. I am of a winged race so I’m able to do this because I applied slight adjustments to my flight path, which I am capable of.

In response, Oriotorai can no longer take any movements to stop the movements of her sword. Because she’s flowing from that one strike into jumping backward, she’ll destroy her balance if she performs any other movements.

Therefore, Oriotorai’s attacks will no longer hit me.

Despite this, an attack found its mark.

“...!?”

Urquiaga, looking down at Oriotorai, took a strike to his outstretched dragon face.

“Tch!”

Losing control of his airborne position, he was blown away.

•

Why did Urquiaga get blown away?

Tenzou’s eyes saw the reason why.

It was the sheath. While swinging her longsword with her right hand, she released the sheath’s clasp.

The sheath sliding off the blade like it was a rail effectively extended the reach of the longsword.

“Guh...!”

Grunting in pain, Urquiaga vanished to the rear.

Tenzou watched.

He saw that Oriotorai was biting the strap of the sheath with her mouth.

The strap was pulled back by a twist of her neck.

The sheath returned.

With the sheath in its place again, the longsword was now headed in a trajectory that would slice into him.

My weapon is a tantō held at the back of my waist. I bought one of the Hankou brand, because I prioritized the thickness of the blade. However, the grip I use is a wooden hilt of the Shirasago brand. It’s more familiar to my hand; and the grip, its original material dyed black, is coated with matte so it doesn’t reflect any light in the night’s darkness.

It was an important piece to Tenzou. He drew it, holding it in a backhand draw with his right hand. Whilst he swung it upwards, he also brought his left hand to the hilt holding it on the pommel. However, he did not thrust it towards Oriotorai.

“Nori-dono!”

As he cried out, Tenzou changed his stance such that he passed his tantō up above his head, dropping his hip.

If he dropped his position in order to forcibly erase all forward velocity, his stance would defend him from attacks coming from above.

He planned to receive Oriotorai’s blade and endure it. And as he withstood it...

“...Quickly!”

A presence came.

A presence from the rear, bursting out from behind his back.

•

Oriotorai saw. She saw that a boy suddenly came flying out from behind Tenzou.

If he was behind Tenzou, then his silhouette should have been seen.

The reason that he had not been visible was...

...A ninja technique!?

Ninja techniques are a ninja’s special physical techniques. Skills like moving noiselessly and controlling visual information were specialized for use in stealth activities. Categorized within these techniques was the ability used in the protection of VIPs. Namely, the ability to sever any indication of a VIP’s presence.

That was what Tenzou had used. Oriotorai shouted the name of the spiky-haired boy in a loose-fitting uniform, who had leaped out from behind Tenzou.

“Noriki was the actual threat!?”

“You don’t have to say it out loud if you get it.”

The boy Noriki closed the distance in a heartbeat.

At the same time, my longsword’s sheath hammered into Tenzou’s tantō.

The feeling which was sent into my hand was lukewarm, as if my sword had

sunk into mud. This was because Tenzou had instantly sunk his body downwards to absorb the shock. Because of this, the sword did not bounce back and it did not immediately return to my hands.

My longsword is an important weapon. If I lose it, many troublesome things will happen before I reach Shinagawa.

In other words, my students.

I cannot let go.

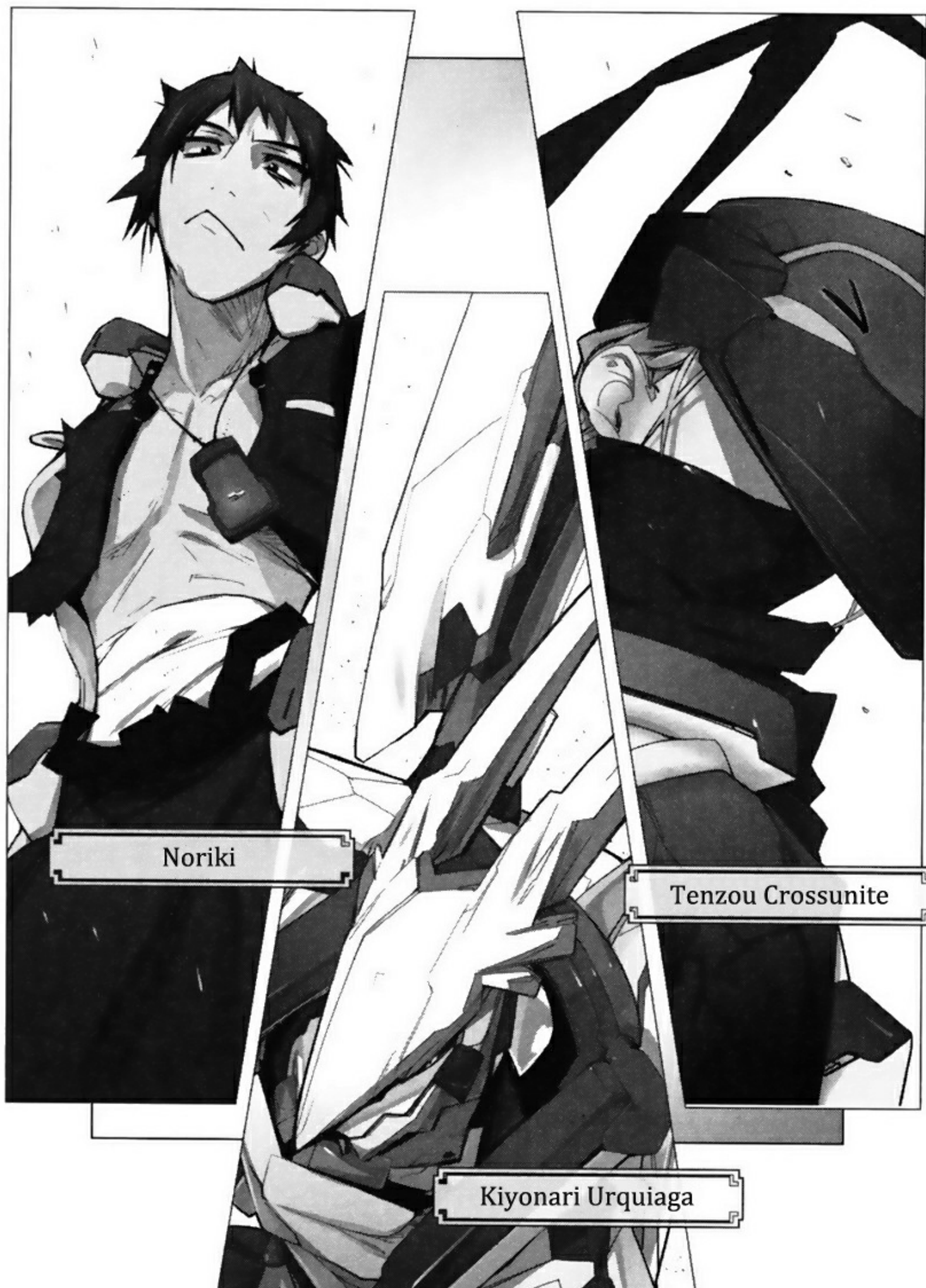
However, precisely because of this, I've allowed Noriki to approach. To my eyes, Noriki's eyes were as always slightly tensed, and he was expressionless as he dashed in. He was always a child whom I could never completely understand; but I'm more than satisfied if he understands teamwork.

Noriki's weapons were his fists.

His right side was pulled back, the palm of his clenched fist facing upwards. The reason his left shoulder was slightly sticking out was because he planned to thunder his right fist straight forward, aided by the recoil of his left shoulder being forced back.

Noriki's attack would come immediately after this, the instant I step down with my right foot. In order to withdraw my sword on the spot, just after swinging it down, I'll have to bring my right foot down to act as an anchor. Noriki is aiming for that moment.

As he's dashing in from a running trajectory, the attack will come from above Tenzou who's crouched down. An attack that'll come from above the longsword I've slashed downwards.



Noriki

Tenzou Crossunite

Kiyonari Urquiaga

As such, Oriotorai moved to counterattack.

•

Tenzou realized that the load pressing down on his arm, which was set in defense, had suddenly disappeared.

...What?

Looking closely, the reason for the disappearance of his arm's burden, the weight of the longsword from above, was simple.

Oriotorai had brought her hand away from the hilt of the longsword, despite the fact that it was her only weapon.

"Eh?"

The instant this thought rose unbidden from his heart. The hilt of the long sword was spinning, coming to fall down towards him.

If the pommel falls downwards, the blade will point upwards.

Using Tenzou's defensive posture as a fulcrum, the point of the blade will point behind Tenzou slanting upwards.

Towards Noriki, who was coming from the back.

Most likely at an angle where it would pierce into his chest from below.

...Damn it...!

"...Ugh."

Behind me, the sound of Noriki drawing a breath was audible.

I heard the sound of Noriki's fist being fired. But, because he had punched earlier than scheduled, he could not have driven his fist into Oriotorai.

The sound of metal rang out. Oriotorai's longsword was punched by Noriki in defense. Still revolving, it was blasted from before my eyes into the air beyond.

As Tenzou watched, Oriotorai's foot came thundering down.

...I'm done.

Tenzou thought this. Oriotorai isn't holding the heavy longsword now. If she does a large bound backwards, she'll be able to do it gracefully.

Furthermore, because it was punched by Noriki, Oriotorai's longsword is flying through the air. Oriotorai's leap backwards will take her closer to it.

Now, I, whose hip has been dropped, am no longer someone who is able to chase after Oriotorai.

I retire here.

Feeling the full force of the word "regret", Tenzou shouted.

"Asama-dono—!!"

•

The trailing group was already moving before Tenzou's voice could reach them.

This was at the time when Noriki had dashed in towards Oriotorai. Keeping behind Noriki, a single girl was moving. An artificial eye inserted into her left eye socket, the girl with long, black hair to whom the nametag "Asama Tomo" was attached brought up a bow she had drawn from her back while keeping her body running in a low position.

The bow "Kataume" with Shirasagi brand's emblem engraved upon it sprung open in an instant from its thrice-folded state. Its nock tuned itself automatically; but even while it was still deploying Neshinbara's voice flew from within the group she was in:

"Persona-kun! Give her a lift!"

A large man at the back of the group responded to his instructions. His upper body was naked and the man's head was covered by a full-face western helmet. He was already carrying a girl whose eyes were covered on his left shoulder.

However, he swung his right arm forward and increased his speed.

"...!"

Coming up next to Asama whose bow was now readied, his right arm stretched towards her.

Following the same exact timing, Asama nodded to Persona-kun once. Bringing her feet onto his arm she flipped her body, jumping to his shoulder.

She smiled at the girl who was lowering her eyes as she sat on the left shoulder across from Asama.

“Um, Suzu-san, I’ll be over here.”

Saying that and dropping her hip, she secured her footing. The girl Asama spoke, her green eye narrowing:

“Ley line: Link...!”

•

In Asama’s field of vision, Noriki who was running ahead of her had swung his fist towards Oriotorai.

...Will it work?

I don’t know. In any case, not once do I remember Oriotorai being hit by one of her students’ attacks. It’s been my responsibility to do so for a year; but at the very least, Oriotorai’s never been defeated by her students in PE class. Or so the upperclassmen tell me.

...No matter how much I think about it, rather than a teacher she’s a real Amazon...! It’s somewhat terrifying...

Taking a breath, Asama regained her composure.

“...It’s my turn. I’ll use my shrine to perform one of the Divine Musician Technique’s Spells!”

“Spell” was the name of a technique that controlled something that existed in this world only: “Ether”, the particle that allowed contradictions and one of the constituents of space.

There were several different schools; but the one Asama was using was the Far East’s principal school, Shinto’s Divine Musician Technique.

As her voice rang out, by the collar of Asama’s school uniform the right collar of her light armor opened and a figure flew out from inside it. It was a diminutive girl wrapped in a faint crimson light. Her figure was slightly transparent.

The girl had a sleepy face; but she mounted Asama’s shoulder, dancing lightly

by twirling her body and waving her right hand.

At the same moment a torii signframe radiating crimson light appeared by Asama's face. Words appeared on the display which was previously blank.

“Link: Asama Shrine - Mouse: Sakuya Type 01: —Confirm.”

“Linked to Asama Shrine. Offering - Prayer - Worship: Processes have been completed by Mouse.”

“Asama Tomo-sama, thank you for using us. Please choose your blessings.”

“I'll be using this with Asama's debt of divine melody as a substitution offering! Hanami... I offer up a Divine Prayer for a triple purification of the projectile's frictional retardation, deviation, and impediment as well as a targeting attachment, for a total of four spells! These are the basic spells of the shrine, so activate them without modification!”

Hearing Asama's words the Mouse who had been called Hanami, the diminutive girl, nodded slightly. Words and a speech bubble appeared by Asama's face.

“Spell of Divine Melody *Four* Therefore / Substitution *Four* Activate ?”

“Yes,” Asama nodded. Sucking in a breath, she brought the arrow drawn from her waist to the bow.

“As substitution...”

Other than being able to receive a long-term blessing at the time of contract, included under Shinto's Divine Musician Technique was the technique “Loan of Divine Melody” which was created through charms and words of power. Now that Asama had decided to use the Loan of Divine Melody, as a condition she must offer things that would make the contracted God rejoice as an activation method. In this manner she is able to gain the effects of her spells.

In exchange for the four spells, the offerings Asama chose were these:

“As two substitutions, I offer up grains at the midday and evening meal! As one substitution, I will dance the kagura for two hours! As one substitution, I will walk and converse with Hanami for two hours! This adds up to a total of four substitutions! Hanami, if this is OK, then grant me my blessings.”

“Yes, yes,” the nodding Hanami looked up for an instant. She clapped her hands together, a smile on her face.

“Yes / Approval granted *Applause* Afterward *Speak To God / Of the current world.*”

The response came synchronized with the timing of Hanami’s claps. Light appeared from Asama’s readied arrow. At first, the light was weak.

“Applause!”

However, as Hanami’s applause continued the amount of light immediately doubled, tripled, and quadrupled; and when the light reached its brightest...

“...!”

Two vertical torii appeared at the end point of Asama’s gaze, the midpoint between Oriotorai and herself.

It was the Divine Musician Technique’s marksmanship spell. With the upper opening of the torii acting as a crosshair, the arrow locked on to the opponent on the other side of the gate effectively setting a destination for the arrow.

Asama’s green artificial eye began to synchronise with the targeting crosshair. The automatic-tracking crosshair automatically moved towards the direction that the eye was looking.

“Artificial eye ‘Konoha’ ...has synchronized!”

In one instant: The green light projected directly from the green eye pierced the double crosshair.

Immediately after:

“...Asama-dono!”

Tenzou’s shout resounded.

Looking forward she could see that Noriki had vaulted over the crouching Tenzou. And beyond them Oriotorai, who had leaped backwards, flipped and grabbed hold of the longsword that had been flying away.

Tenzou and the others had failed.

Therefore, Asama fired.

“Go!”

She let the arrow fly.

Along with a sound like water splashing a line of light shot forth, bursting outwards.

It was unlike the bullets and arrows and linear spells that everyone had been firing up till this point. Because of the purification of deviation, it was imbued with a tracking spell. Even at the shrine, it was something that was not used unless purging flying or agile monsters.

Oriotorai, who was moving ahead of them, was the target of the arrow which had been given a temporary blessing through Asama’s use of spells. In addition Asama had fired exactly when Oriotorai was crossing from one roof to another.

...Today, I will hit!

I’m a daughter of one of the main pillars of the Musashi shrines, the Asama shrine. My father has a contract with the Shirasago brand, selling Asama goods wholesale to the Academy’s finance department; so he asked me about the shrine’s reputation at the Academy. There aren’t any bad rumors. My grades are fairly good, and I’m also the club-president of the tea club. There’s no need for my family to worry about me influencing the shrine’s reputation for the worse.

But my father had a single question.

“I wonder if you won’t hit that teacher even once before you graduate...”

That was the kind of situation I was in.

At first I was told not to use this spell on a human; but when he noticed that I had challenged her for the fifth time and had not yet come out on top, he asked me: “Eh...? Why not? Isn’t that weird? I mean, normally if you add a spell it’ll hit, right?” The reason I hadn’t hit was because Oriotorai’s fighting and athletic prowess exceeded that of an Amazon’s; but making my father understand that a person like that existed was a daunting task.

Because of this, I practiced with my father and formed a high-rank contract at the start of this year. Not only does this arrow home in on its target due to my purification, it readjusts its trajectory and other factors when it’s given the

ability to dodge obstacles. I had only reached the level of skill needed to use it in practice a few days ago.

This was the first time that I'd used this in class with my artificial eye synchronized as well.

...How do you like this?

The arrow of light trailed a line of light and clear sound, darting in towards its prey with a trajectory that made it seem as if it was a fist, not an arrow.



Asama Tomo

Persona-kun



Mukai Suzu

In contrast, Oriotorai was currently in the air having jumped from one roof to another. The large leap she had performed just now was meant to send her flying over the road below. Her air time was long, and during it she could not dodge.

On the contrary, my arrow has been blessed with high-speed and tracking.

Asama saw. She saw that Oriotorai had readied her longsword at her neck, allowing a slight glimpse of the blade from the sheath.

...She's going to try to suddenly slice the arrow out of the air?

Asama raised her eyebrows slightly.

"It's impossible! Not only does it track, I've also given it natural evasiveness by purifying it of impediment so it will curve around all obstacles!"

Just as Asama had said, the arrow moved such that it twisted around Oriotorai's longsword.

In response, still keeping the blade in its sheath Oriotorai stuck her sword out vertically, using it as a barrier against the arrow.

Yet, it was too late.

The arrow wreathed in light had already avoided the longsword, and with a movement that sent it skidding sideways it flitted towards Oriotorai. The reason it's aimed at her face was because I, a rather tall individual, shot an unstoppable force from Persona-kun's shoulder; but as might be expected, I felt a slight uneasiness which stemmed from us both being women.

However, this was not an opponent who would allow me enough composure to choose a place to target. I'll take care of the healing. Not free, of course.

Anyway, Asama thought to herself. I did it, Father. Today, let us have chirashizushi in celebration of sinking the teacher. Because of the substitution blessing I have a limit on my meals during the day; but it's fine if we have some ice cream afterward!

Asama thought as she followed the arrow with her eyes.

She thought of what Oriotorai had been saying before.

...The Apocalypse.

Certainly, reports of the disturbances in the ley lines were coming from shrines everywhere; and the frequency of these reports was also rising. Musashi, which was an aerial cruiser, had a low frequency of phenomena; but on the ground the vanishing of villages because of earthquakes, the birth of islands because of the rise of the earth in the sea, cases of people being spirited away, and the loss of knowledge through the disappearance of thoughts were common occurrences.

What bothered me the most was that recently, Father had started saying, "Don't talk about this with anyone." This was certainly an order that would come from the head of a shrine; but on the other hand, even with the organized power of all the shrines throughout the Far East's territory...

...They were lost, unable to figure out a clear method of solving the phenomena that were currently occurring...

The reason she had strengthened her spell contract was to increase, if only by a little, the power available to her to deal with this.

If it's possible, Asama thought. If it's possible, please let the rumors of the Apocalypse not become reality; at least not before I graduate. When I graduate, I'll search through the shrine's network and investigate the phenomena.

And now I've let loose the power that will lead me onwards, to the future.

Asama, fists clenched in her heart that was filled with fighting spirit, stared at the arrow's destination.

She saw that the arrow of light that she had released fragmented on the other side of Oriotorai's longsword.

A noise rang out, and light burst forth.

"...We did it!"

Seeing the light and noise, everyone around was cheering; but Asama was the only one to keep her eyes open, and she shouted this:

"No!! The response was too light! ...It didn't hit!!"

Asama cried out. She shook the fingers of the hand that had released the

arrow, confirming the feeling that cut through the air.

“...My ice cream!!”

•

Why?

This question echoed within Asama.

It was a spell that blessed arrows to hit. She reserved its use for the most powerful of monsters.

...Why!? The power of Shinto lost to a Super-Amazon power!?

As if answering the cry in Asama’s heart, Oriotorai moved.

She placed the raised longsword upon her shoulder.

Having become visible, her face could be described in one word: unharmed. There was not one injury on her mouth, where a faint smile hovered, or on her cheeks.

The next instant she sent her body flying to the roof across the road, the roof of one of the business buildings which made up the business district.

Bending her body backwards, Oriotorai took a step and accelerated. Her speed had not dropped in the slightest; Asama’s attack did not seem to have had any effect.

...Why?

The moment Asama asked this, having been left behind by Oriotorai everyone jumped towards the roofs of the business area, still perplexed.

At that moment Neshinbara, who had caught up from the back, grabbed something out of the air and shouted:

“It was her hair!”

Drawing everyone’s attention as they continued to run, Neshinbara raised his eyebrows.

“Just now, Oriotorai held her longsword to her neck. That was when she cut her hair slightly. In the same movement she stuck her longsword forwards,

restricting the arrow's trajectory to a curved one and scattering a part of her own body, her hair, onto the arrow's path. In conclusion...the arrow, caught up in the chaff of hair, decided that it had hit her and it lost the technique's power."

Hearing this explanation, Asama swallowed her voice with everyone.

Neshinbara looked forward. He turned his gaze towards Oriotorai, who was still accelerating.

"But when we were second years, we couldn't even make her cut her hair. Asama-kun, what's your total capacity of internal-fuel blessing?"

"Ah, it reached thirty-six at the start of the school year. I can use what I used just now another nine times."

"Mmmm," Asama groaned inwardly.

Fundamentally different from charms, which were spell-conductors that could be charged with ether, oral spells like the Loan of Divine Melody expended units of ether fuel such as offerings and blessing in order to activate.

Blessing was divided into internal-fuel blessing and external-fuel blessing. Internal-fuel gathered inside oneself through activities like meditation, but external-fuel was stored in the faith's shared ether storage by performing acts of devotion at shrines or churches. In times of need it could be withdrawn and used.

Several hours are needed to accumulate a single unit of blessing. If you then offered that to the denomination's shared ether storage as external-fuel blessing, transactions using that blessing were possible since others could also make use of it.

Because of this, using internal-fuel blessing to use a spell meant spending several hours of hard work in the accumulation of blessing and losing the chance of using it in transactions as external-fuel blessing.

As such, Asama had activated a Shinto substitution offering just now. She could substitute for blessing by personifying the ways of Shinto or dedicating the things a God rejoiced in as offerings.

However, Asama had already cited four offerings. If she increased the number of offerings, her everyday-life would become stifling. Therefore, Asama was now thinking of using the internal-fuel blessing accumulated within her for the next few spells, but...

...There's probably going to be more work to do in the shrine.

I can't think so naively, she thought.

Therefore Asama shook her head once, making her decision.

"Let's go!"

Hearing those words, everyone nodded. Chasing Oriotorai, they exited the business area and jumped down to the frontal deck and onto the thick ropes beyond which crossed the air over to Shinagawa.

"Catch her!"

•

Everyone chased Oriotorai as she ran ahead of them; they sprinted along the airborne corridor of thick rope that traveled towards Shinagawa.

The thick rope consisted of intertwined oil and water pipes, all of which were made of a pliable material. It was around one meter thick. Because a gravity floor about three meters in width had been created on top, an invisible path existed above the rope.

They were used to running atop this gravity corridor which crossed above the the rope. They had to be, because the road was invisible and the slant of the rope and incline of the outside world did not always remain constant.

Still, everyone went onward. They ran, their motion shaking the white string that had been added to mark the edges of the corridor.

"Margot! Let's go!"

"Yes, yes, it's dangerous to hurry like that you know!"

The two winged girls went ahead, their voices spilling out from the corridor. It was Naruze, who had six black wings, and Naito, who had six golden wings. They held each other's hands.

“...”

Simultaneously, the two of them threw their bodies off of the thick rope. They fell.

However, in the midst of their rapid descent which spanned tens of meters, black and gold flowers bloomed; their wings had opened. They used their falling motion and the accumulated air within their wings to spread them wide. The two of them gave each other high fives using both of their hands.

“Let’s go...black and white Magi Gunners, the ensemble of fallen and descended angel!”

Continuing to embrace each other, they flew in this manner.

With a downward motion the wings on their back ejected the compressed air behind them.

Created as a result was a method of flying even fiercer than the wing beats of a bird; a method comparable to jumping in mid air. With one flap, they ascended thirty meters.

“Accelerate...!”

Because their two sets of six wings continued to flap further, the two of them exceeded the altitude of the thick rope in an instant. They turned to face the direction directly above Oriotorai. Flapping their wings by swinging their bodies, they braked in midair sending the wind screaming.

As they twirled the two winged girls displayed their special weapons, which were held in both hands.

The golden-winged Naito was holding a black Magi Figur modeled after a speedometer. It was roughly 50 centimeters long.

The black-winged Naruze was holding a white Magi Figur with a dragonfly-frame, the size of an A4 sheet of paper.

Faced with the spells-frames the two had opened, Oriotorai who was running below them shouted in surprise:

“The spell-focus bunch caught up? Naruze and Naito have made their

appearance with the time everyone has bought, then.”

“That’s right. We’re in the middle of a lesson, so we won’t use Schwarz Fräulein or Weiss Fräulein.”

Using her finger Naruze drew an arrow of light in the center of the dragonfly-frame. As she piled up silver coins that she had taken out of her wallet atop the frame, Shirojiro and the others had met up with everyone and started to strengthen their spells.

“Shirojiro, who has a high-rank contract with a god of merchants, has finally caught up.”

Naruze muttered. Naito piled the copper coins she had taken out of her wallet on top of her speedometer Magi Figur.

“Shiro’ll be able to use the god of merchants’s spell intercession to perform ‘market segmentation’ on the charms and techniques that other people hold. Duration and effect are also segmented, so it can’t be used other than at the last spurt; but now should be fine...”

The instant Naito reached that point, a large silhouette suddenly passed behind the two.

“...!?”

Not only the two of them, but everyone below them as well looked up at the sky.

Multiple colossal figures were there in the blue expanse.

They were winged giants with rifles in their hands. With four wings in a cruciate style attached to their backs and their skin of white steel wrapped with crimson armored clothing, they were flying.

“A number of Testament Union-allied Tres España’s aerial-use gods of war. Did they come to warn us because we were causing trouble!?”

Gods of war. The total height of these winged giants was about ten meters. Three of these gigantic figures were flying in the sky by the starboard.

One of the gods of war approached Naito and Naruze before switching to a path that took him further away. It was the same machine that had flown

behind the flying girls before distancing itself.

The tails of its armored clothing fluttering, the god of war getting further and further away met up with its comrades. Once it did, it set its wings aflutter and accelerated.

Wind sprung forth. With a force that was many times that of the wind the two winged girls had created, he flew through the air.

“...”

Rifles still at the ready, the three white and crimson constructs flipped upwards. Their flight path brought them to look downwards.

Naruze looked up to the sky and clicked her tongue.

“Aerial-use models that don’t have feet. Just like the battle-hungry Tres España. Even though we don’t even think about trying to leave Musashi, they’re showing us how much their fingers’re itching for the trigger...it’s the worst. I wonder if I’ll do some research on the pilots and have them star in our school’s Manga Research Club’s homo-manga. Tres España’ll always be the receiver...!”

“Then, who from our class should be the pitcher side? ...But well, being Technohexen and of an irregular race like you and Nai-chan, going outside is more troublesome. Nai-chan thinks that they’re also doing their work.

“Masa-yan said it was pretty terrible. These gods of war are one of the models of Tres’ brand ‘San Mercado’, but their technological skills are lacking so the drive threads are K.P.A. Italian made. All they have is their pride, so they’re stuck guarding most of Musashi’s circuit of the eastern countries. Tres España are going bankrupt.”

“ ‘San Mercado’ ...A lot of their parts are really aggressive and primitive, from the Reconquista times. That’s why they’re in this situation. It’s being said that K.P.A. Italia’s Pope-Chancellor was going to come all the way here to have Mikawa make a new Logismoí Óplo. Things must be heating up at the border between Mikawa and P.A. Oda, since Mikawa has a connection with that nation which has half-seceded from the Testament Union.”

“Logismoí Óplo?” Naito muttered softly. Seeing her look downwards, Naruze said this:

“It’s a type of divine weapon. They’re city-destruction class personal armaments. There are eight armaments that take the historical concepts of the seven deadly sins as their motifs. In the shadows, their wielders are called the ‘Eight Dragon Kings’. Ten years ago when Mikawa made a formal alliance with P.A. Oda, they were distributed amongst the countries affiliated with the Testament other than P.A. Oda so Mikawa could show that they had no intention of rebelling against the Testament Union.

“...I wonder what the real situation is. The raw materials for the construction of the Logismoi Óplo are, like the rumors say, probably a human’s—”

The moment Naruze spoke this. A voice rang out from below them.

Far below the thick rope, a person in work clothes was leaning out from an emergency exit near the bottom of Shinagawa and was shouting.

It was a white-haired old man, and he was using a rolled-up manual as a megaphone.

“Hey...! Don’t make so much noise and hurt the ship...!”

“Ga-chan, Taizou-chan from engineering is being simply unreasonable.”

“Your tendency to just give up is simply splendid, Naito. You couldn’t care less about the threats from the higher up.”

“That’s because...” Naito sucked in a breath before moving the needle of the black speedometer-model Magi Figur. She looked at Naruze over it, a smile on her face.

“...That’s because this is a lesson.”

“I see,” Naruze’s face broke into a smile. The two readied their special weapons, the Magi Figur, pointing them towards Oriotorai who was running below them.

“Lesson, lesson—!”

They fired the effects of their spell.

•

There was a gaze.

This gaze looked to the light and sound that eventually resumed over Shinagawa.

The gaze in question stared out from the observation deck, which lay in the vicinity of the leading-middle ship's bow.

There stood a black-haired automaton. An armband with "Musashi" written on it was attached to her shoulder.

She stared out towards Shinagawa.

Though she remained silent and unmoving, things moved around her. It was an armada of deck cleaning equipment, made up of mops and brushes. Though no one was holding these tools, they moved by themselves scrubbing away at the deck.

"Have you been cleaning all day? That must've been hard work. Also, is it really alright if you aren't on the bridge?"

The automaton "Musashi" did not so much as turn around to respond to the question. She continued to look in Shinagawa's direction.

"We have left both the mass of harmonic territories and the hostile Sagarmatha Corridor. The preparations for docking at Mikawa have already been completed. Because the Mikawa area is a stable territory where no harmonic territories exist, as Musashi's fleet captain I need to carry out performance checks on each part of the ship. However, as Musashi has no armaments that maintenance is simple. To be blunt, I have free time.

"To supply additional information, cleaning is a task suited to the automaton race. Therefore doing it with our basic power, gravity control, is not a difficult task. Judge, President Sakai? Over."

Saying "Judge," the past-middling man, Sakai, walked up to stand beside the automaton.

"Mikawa, huh? ...As usual, I've got to descend to the checkpoint and do the paperwork for docking; but this time an old friend of mine's telling me to show my face, and after these ten years have passed... For the first time in ten years, it should be alright to go to central Mikawa, huh. Mikawa is close to closing its borders now."

“Judge. Ten years ago when Sakai-sama was demoted by Mikawa, Mikawa had formalized its provisional alliance with P.A. Oda. With the Testament Union’s cooperation, they forbade the boarding of the Musashi and restricted foreign trade to Mikawa’s outskirts. Now, all the central district is that black box.

“The royal family of Mikawa were made the rulers of the Far East by the Testament’s description. In order to establish their status as the supreme authority of the Far East, both their right to autocracy and their right to be the window between the Far East and Testament Union were approved by the Testament Union; but...”

“But?”

Musashi thought for a small while. After the moment passed, she spoke again.

“I judge that after formalizing his alliance with P.A. Oda, who have half-seceded from the Testament Union, Lord Motonobu of the Matsudaira family was able to forge his own path forward. The Matsudaira family replaced all its human resources, all but their most trusted associates, with automatons. Also, due to the construction of the grand workshop New Nagoya Castle which houses a ley line reactor forbidden by the Testament Union, the town is full of phenomena and other such events; and the city is in an unstable state. Be wary of your surroundings, but act unconcerned. Over.”

“Wow, isn’t that forbidden territory? I really don’t want to go there... Even though I’ve tried so hard to ignore them, why on Earth’re they calling the demoted me to come?”

“Judge. Were you not, to be brief, colleagues? Until ten years ago you were part of the Matsudaira Four Heavenly Kings who supported the Matsudaira... In any case, please be careful. The head of Mikawa, Matsudaira ‘Yes-Man’ Motonobu, is able to make gifts to the Oda using New Nagoya Castle’s ley line reactor.

“Musashi belongs to the ruler of Mikawa, Lord Motonobu. However, IZUMO constructed the basic components and handled the Great Renovation ten years ago; therefore, we are unable to conjecture upon the intent of Lord Motonobu or the automatons who serve him. Even during this docking, we will be mooring

as a neutral country and taking on supplies; but there are no plans for exchanges across the populace. Putting into consideration how far we are able to leave Musashi, we are able to go no further than the checkpoints. Over.”

“That’s a pain,” Sakai muttered, scratching his salt and pepper hair.

In the distance, sharp, white explosions burst outwards from Shinagawa.

After a while, the sound reached them. Sakai rubbed his chin with his hand.

“Ah, then what do you think of them from your viewpoint, Musashi?”

“Judge. Speaking more expressively than I did at the year’s beginning, I judge them to be flashy. Speaking in terms of physical quantities, the amount of destruction has increased. Speaking from the people’s point of view, both the degree of annoyance and entertainment value have increased.”

“And speaking personally?”

“ ‘Musashi’, one and the same with the body of Musashi, is a unified being formed from several bodies. Furthermore, as I am not a human I cannot carry out judgements from a personal point of view. Over.”

“Then,” Sakai said. He brought his elbow to the edge of the deck, the railing. “As the entire ship Musashi, what do you think?”

“Judge. Speaking from my records of these ten years after the Great Renovation, they are the best. Compared to the other countries’ warrior units... the Far East’s students, left unable to receive battle instruction and with the exception of the defense force unable to form battle related organizations due to the Testament Union’s instructions...”

She thought a little.

“If I had individuality, I would judge them to be worthy. Over.”

“Musashi” moved her gaze down from Shinagawa.

Below her, from within the rows of mountains a crimson line rose straight towards the sky.

A line of crimson light.

The light rose to pierce the path that Musashi would take.

“This is the closest marker to Mikawa. After responding from the lower bow of this ship, Musashino, we will enter stealth flight by obscuring sensory information and leave the hospitable section of the upper atmosphere to enter Mikawa’s continental port. Over.”

Sakai, nodding with a “Judge” looked at the group of three crimson and white gods of war who were flying alongside Musashi.

“Because of the other countries’ surveillance, Musashi can move on nothing but the boundary lines between the countries... If we don’t cross the markers on the proposed flight plan, Musashi will be seen as intending to invade the other countries and permission to sink us will be granted by the Testament Union...”



"Musashi"

Sakai Tadatsugu

As they watched one of the white gods of war touched its hand to one of its companions' backs, replacing its miniature kinetic converters which came in the model of a power-coil.

And far away, the sound of explosions resounded from Shinagawa again. Smoke rose, fading into the sky.

"It's so troublesome... Since all the countries from the Harmonic World have been stuck together in the Far East after the collapse of the Harmonic World, the Divine States' Sengoku period and the battles of the rest of the world are being enacted simultaneously as fights between the Academies; all on the narrow Divine States.

"This is also happening because of the guidance of the Testament, which records the history of the Former Earth Age. It could be said to be the walkthrough to the world."

A glance.

"After attaining the Nobunaga name 8 years ago, the Oda family (which set the Sengoku period into motion) crushed the Mlasi rebellion's power in order to strengthen the core of the Ottomans, P.A. Oda. They half-seceded from the Testament Union... Wary of his historical assassination being recreated by the Testament Union, Nobunaga no longer shows himself. However, he did not stop invading the other countries and has now become a demon who cannot be stopped by the recreation of his historical assassination; an existence that the whole world fears.

"...One hundred and sixty years ago, the other countries thought that if they created residential areas and Musashi and crowded all the people of the Far East into them, they'd be able to directly control the Far East. Now the Matsudaira family has officially allied with the Oda family, just as described in the Testament's description of history; and Musashi is evading the control of the other countries."

"However," Musashi continued. "According to the Testament, it is the time for everything in the world to end. Over."

“Musashi” continued to speak.

Where in the Testament was the end of the world foretold?

“As it is synchronized with fate, the Testament automatically renews itself for the next 100 years allowing the future to be read. 100 years ago, it stopped renewing itself and the history of the next year and the years onward were not recorded.

“The last description was of the Westphalia Conference, and the history from then onwards has not been recorded... As such, the masses have acknowledged the conference that takes place on October 24th of this year as the ‘oblivion due to the Apocalypse’ and it is being questioned if the world is drawing to an end as the year draws to a close.”

“Yeah,” Sakai said again. He looked at the smoke streaming from atop Shinagawa.

“Because of this, the countries are conducting a serious search as to why fate will stop this year; but they’ve been unable to formulate a conclusion or countermeasure... P.A. Oda is the only country to display a national plan to resolve the Apocalypse, the ‘Genesis Project’, and is recruiting people for its cause.

“Well, the ‘Genesis Project’ just seems like a false front, like they’re just going to make up the plan as they go.

“Even so, since we seem to be in the middle of it, everyone’s glaring at us,” Sakai said to himself.

“Judge,” Musashi responded. She also looked at the smoke streaming up above Shinagawa.

“Currently the world appears to be moving along without a hint of stopping; but it is certain that the Testament, which is synchronized with fate, has stopped and phenomena are occurring more frequently everywhere in the world. Asama-sama of the currently rampaging Third Year Plum Class has formed a high-rank contract with the shrine this year; but monsters of the aerial and mobility types that require a high-rank marksmanship blessing rarely appeared, even ten years ago.

“In the same way, the recent outbreak of night wanderings and frequent cases of people being spirited away are attributed to disturbances in the ley lines; but as the ley lines are circuits of ether which govern the entropy of the world and the state of flux of everything in it, they are linked with fate. According to one theory, fate will eventually disappear so the balance of the ley lines will be destroyed. —Over.”

“In short, various signs that point to fate ending have appeared?”

“Judge,” “Musashi” said before suddenly turning her back to him.

Sakai turned towards “Musashi”, but she had already started walking towards the bridge.

“Bits of information concerning the phenomena are coming from everywhere.”

She said.

“One moment, the nobles of the other countries have been suddenly spirited away; and the next, a resident of a village somewhere else suddenly disappears. The prophets of the Hexagone Française have tried to peer beyond fate, and they seem to have collectively lost their souls.

“In the New World, even the past is disappearing from the wall-paintings of the natives of the New World. —Over.”

“...Things’re lively, aren’t they?”

“Judge, the variety is currently increasing. Furthermore, they are tending towards becoming bigger and bigger. The frequency is increasing as well. It is almost as if the phenomena are being forced out by an unknown force which travels towards fate, which has been interrupted.”

“I see. You really know a lot of about this, Musashi-san. Is it a hobby? A mania? Could you be an otaku about this?”

“If I am to answer, I would say that it is a pastime. —Over.”

“Musashi” faced his way and nodded slightly.

In the distance, the sound of explosions resounded once again.

•

There existed a market.

This market was situated in the temporary residential district, which in turn was located at the tip of the cargo ship Shinagawa, on the deck of its bow.

This temporary residential area was a place that was not managed very strictly.

“That’s why the yakuza offices are there.”

Oriotorai’s words echoed in front of one of the buildings that stood in a line, spaces between them.

Her back towards the black-painted office that had been created out of a modified cargo container, Oriotorai looked at the deck.

There, more than ten students had collapsed on the floor, unmoving. Most of them were on their faces or lying face-up, but depending on the person, some were crying and wetting the deck.

Facing all of them, Oriotorai’s breath was not ragged in the slightest.

“Come on; don’t just sleep after getting here after me. Um, Suzu?”

“Ye...yes, what...is it?”

The girl sitting next to the collapsed and stationary Persona-kun spoke with a questioning tone. Keeping her eyes lowered and continuing to kneel, she turned towards Oriotorai. In response, Oriotorai flashed her a smile.

“Are you the only one alive?”

“Yes? ...Ah, no, I-I, wa-was car-car-carried so, ah, yes.”

“That’s a choice based upon teamwork, so it’s fine. One survivor, and it seems that you properly rescued those who were retired on the way here. Far better than your second year.”

“Yes,” Suzu nodded.

At that moment, the front gate of the office behind Oriotorai opened.

Hearing the sharp noise, Suzu pulled her body back, her eyes still lowered,

and Oriotorai tilted her neck towards her back.

A distance of twenty meters. Opening and exiting the door of the office was an angular giant who could not have been below three meters in height. Oriotorai looked at his four arms, which were covered with crimson scales.

“My, my, how the demons have fallen. Or rather, we’re in the air right now.”

“Who the hell are you!?”

The deep voice rang out, sending Suzu’s body trembling. Everyone lying down picked themselves up.

They looked at Oriotorai and the circumstances surrounding her.

“Sensei... Are you really going to do this?”

“That’s right,” Oriotorai said, not even bothering to turn her body to face the demon walking towards her from behind.

Neither did she draw the longsword that was slung over her shoulder.

“Well then everyone, we’ll be having the practical lesson now. Got it? Thanks to the fact that their organs contain approximations of ether reactors, the accumulation speed of their inner-fuelled blessing isn’t a joke. Not only is their skin heavily armored, their strength is about the same as a light god of war.”

“Well, aren’t you an expert!?” the approaching crimson demon said.

“Who the hell are you guys!? Having a field trip in front of our building!?”

“Mmm. Ahh, the truth is the night watch asked me to do this. Please get them, they said. Ah, but personally I’m here about the land buyout at Takao the other day. Remember that?”

“Huh? You think I’d remember things that happen all the time!?”

“I see,” Oriotorai said. She slowly turned her body to face the demon.

“It must be pretty horrible to be blown away without even knowing the reason why.”

“You...!”

The demon came. His massive strength as well as the bone structure that

supported it brought the gigantic body which exceeded three hundred kilograms in weight to a speed of 150 kph with one step. The charge that brought the four hammer-like arms swinging forward had also been used during the charge, so it was not meant to be used against people.

The fact that the crimson demon charged Oriotorai led to this.

“Maybe you’re worried ’cause I mentioned the night watch? Good call, but...”

Before the colossal body closing in, Oriotorai said this.

“I will now give a demonstration.”

•

As she spoke, Oriotorai stepped her right foot forward.

Her longsword was lowered to her bottom-left.

“Even if they have a gigantic body, strength, and armor, demons have a fatal weak point.”

That weak point was this:

“Living creatures have skulls, and they have brains. If you shake the head, the brain will impact the interior of the skull and the nervous system will be numbed. That’s a concussion. An effective method of shaking the skull is to bludgeon something that’s closely related to the head. If you hit a location rather far from the head, the vibrations will resonate greatly.”

That location was this:

“For a human, the tip of the jaw. For a demon...”

Oriotorai moved. The right foot she had stepped forward acting as a fulcrum, she twisted her body right and forward, moving from the left.

Continuing on, she spun her body in one revolution, swinging her longsword as she evaded the path of the demon’s charge.

“It’s here.”

Filled with the momentum of her spinning, the longsword was swung. She let the tip of the sheath run upwards.

“The tip of the horns on the head. Hit the slanted horn like you’re trying to hook it.”

As she spoke, the sheath of the longsword, rising with a light movement, smashed into the left horn of the demon who was passing by in its charging state.

A sound echoed.

It was nothing more than a single strike that had slightly bent the demon’s neck.

Despite this...

“——!?”

Advancing forward for a couple more steps, the demon suddenly lost power in its knees and it fell to the deck.

He did not fall because he could not control his charge. His knees had trembled, and he lost all balance.

The gigantic body broke the wooden deck, gouging out the structural material. Because of the impact, he braked in a short distance.

“Ah...!?”

“Shit...”

The crimson demon tried to stand; but though he was able to raise his waist, he could not force power into his knees. If he picked his body up, he would repeatedly fall.

Oriotorai stood before the demon.

“When demons and other gigantic living creatures go into this state, the nerve clusters in each part of their bodies will start working in place of the brain so their recovery is fast. So before that happens...strike the position diagonal from the weak point.”

As per her words, she smashed his right jaw which was diagonal from the tip of his left horn.

It was a strong blow. The demon’s body, which he could not put any power

into, was unable to defend itself.

“— —”

His neck twisting, he fainted.

“Actually, hitting anything that looks hard is fine. If you do so, the vibrations will resonate directly. These guys’ heads aren’t really exoskeletons; it’s just their endoskeleton jutting out. If you smash them from a perfect direction, it’ll directly resound to their brain. What you can’t do is hit from a direction like you’re trying to smash their neck in, from directly above or directly into the charge. Demons’ neck bones and backbones are one straight line, and they’re hunchbacks, so impacts from directly above travel from their back to their butt. That’s why they can smash their horns together during adolescence or puberty.”

While she was speaking, the crimson demon dropped prone and the door of the office behind her was hurriedly slammed shut.

Oriotorai glanced at the office.

“Aah, they’ve gotten scared of me.”

“Of course they have,” everyone said as they began to pick up their worn out bodies. In response, Oriotorai said this:

“Mmm, then, how should we go in? The entrance is probably being defended. Even though I’m leading everyone, smashing in from the roof is a little difficult...”

“...Um, what do you mean by lead, Sensei?”

“Mm? This’s a practical examination on a societal field trip. I gave a demonstration, right?”

“Like we could do acrobatics like that!”

“It’s all right, it’s all right. You’ll become able to do it now.”

Hearing her calm tone, everyone’s face turned pale.

At that moment, suddenly, a young voice came from the side.

“—Huh? Hey, hey, hey, everyone, what’re you doing?”

Everyone turned to the boy's voice.

A single boy was standing to the side of the class. He had brown hair and eyes that smiled. He was clutching two paper bags to the left of his long, rough and crumpled uniform that had chains attached to it.

He took a piece of bread from the paper bag he had gotten from a snack shop and put it in his mouth.

Someone spoke the name of the boy whose decorative chains clanked as he walked.

“Toori ‘Impossible’ Aoi...!”

•

The boy whose name they had called, Toori, ate an entire bun by stuffing it into his mouth.

“—Mmm, yeah, that's me, that's me... Wait, what? Everyone I, Aoi Toori, am right here, y'know?”

The smile on his face unwavering, he walked up in front of everyone, ignoring the fallen demon.

“But hey, guys, this's a coincidence isn't it? Could it be that everyone lined up too!?”

He said, holding up one of the paper bags and showing it off. Seeing it, Oriotorai tilted her head to the side.

She twisted behind Toori in the space of a heartbeat, the longsword hefted onto her shoulder.

“...Then, you, could you give a short version of what you skipped class to line up for? Please tell me.”

“Ehh? You're actually interested in what I got!? I'm done for!”

Toori took out a box covered with pictures from inside the paper bag. He showed the art on the packaging to Oriotorai over his shoulder.

“Can you see it, Sensei! This is the R-rated eroge ‘Nuruhachi!!’ that came on sale today. It seems that this is a super tearjerker, and I was lining up for the

first-press limited edition since the morning. Once I get back home today, I'm going to install this on my PC and spill an ocean of tears while being a perv! Tenzou, you want this too, don't you!? ...Huh? Where's Tenzou? His old man was going for the special editions offered by different shops and ninja'd to the other stores. Maybe he went too? What do you think, Sensei?"



Aoi Toori

Instead of responding, Oriotorai, eyes half-closed, silently placed her hand on Toori's shoulder.

In response, Toori crooked his neck to the side and turned to face Oriotorai with a smile.

"Huh? Sensei, what's wrong? That's one hell of a face you're making. Was there something that happened which you don't like? ...Ahh, I get it, Sensei was lectured in a reprimanding manner by the president or the king for eating with a force as if getting married to the beef without even talking to anyone when we went to the barbecue shop at the end of the spring holiday, right? You can't do that, Sensei. Flipping fried things with your chopsticks and shoving them directly into your mouth isn't what karuta's about. At least add some salt. Also, don't eat such a mountain of cake for dessert; try vegetables once in a while."

Everyone reared back, preparing to evade the coming mayhem. Standing in front of them, Oriotorai spoke.

"...Hey, do you know what I want to say right now?"

"Mmm? What're you saying, Sensei! Sensei and I are people who are connected so well that we know what each other are thinking, right!? What Sensei wants to say is clearly passed on to me, you know!?"

"Aah, that's not true at all. I mean, if you were connected with me you'd have to commit suicide right now."

"Ehh!? What!? You weren't going to let me fondle your boobs!?"

Toori frowned and opened his mouth. Oriotorai looked at him from below with upturned eyes.

"That's dirty! Adults are dirty...! This female teacher acted like she was going to let me fondle her breasts and tried to kill me...!"

"...Hey, you, can't you see something kinda strange? You all right? Are those eyes seeing anything?"

"Yep, right now it's this!"

With that, Toori pressed in and lifted up Oriotorai's breasts from the bottom left and right with both sets of five fingers on his two hands.

As everyone's mouths froze while saying "Ah," Heidi tilted her head.

"Huh? ...Does this mean that an attack hit..."

Yet Toori, who didn't know the rules, frowned while kneading Oriotorai's breasts.

"Huh, I thought it'd be a lot more firm though... Strange, that's seriously strange... My plans to be horrified at the amount of bone and muscle in here are..."

"Well, whatever," Toori brought his hands away.

Ignoring Oriotorai whose mouth was twisted at the edges and whose fists were clenched so hard that her knuckles creaked, he looked towards everyone.

"Um, everyone, let me ask a little question. I think that I talked about this a little beforehand, but..."

After a breath, he uttered these words.

"I think I'm going to confess tomorrow."

•

Hearing Toori's sudden declaration of his confession, everyone had the same reaction. They all dropped their head forward in the same way.

"...Eh?"

However, that reaction immediately turned into "Ah," in a voice tinged with comprehension.

A wavy-haired girl stood up from within the crowd and frowned. She, Kimi, ran her fingers through her mussed hair before staring at Toori, her head tilted to the side.

"Ufufu~, foolish brother, suddenly appearing, fondling breasts, and then declaring your confession without any sort of explanation aren't the lines of a human who goes around carrying packages of erotic games. If the person you're going to confess to is on the other side of the screen, you should stick your dick inside with their consent and die from shock! Wonderful! Please explain what's going on to your intelligent sister!"

“Hey, hey, Sis, what’s this ‘it’s fine by yourself’ atmosphere you’re soaking up? You know something? I’m confessing tomorrow, so I bought this as my graduation from erotic games, alright? Do you not understand my honestly lively manner!?”

“Ufufu~, that’s a good feeling for a failure as a human, foolish brother, excellent! But if you get rejected tomorrow, what are you going to do?”

“Mmm, in that case, first I guess I’ll complete all the character routes using my real name, crying all the while.”

“That’s not what you’re supposed to do, is it?” everyone said, but Kimi sighed. Her shoulders sagged.

“Then foolish brother, let’s practice your confession, with your intelligent sister as the confessee. Spit it out, who is she!”

“Idiot, you should know this, right? Didn’t everyone just say, ‘Isn’t it her?’ ”

Toori moved his gaze from his sister to roam across the others.

Looking at all of their faces, his gaze met with each of theirs one by one. After he crossed gazes with the last of them, he said this.

“...It’s Horizon.”

A person’s name. Yet...

“That’s stupid.”

Sagging her shoulders, Kimi spoke. She moved her gaze away from Toori.

“She died ten years ago. In ‘Remorse Way’ that you hate so much... Didn’t our father make the gravestone?”

“I know. It’s just that I’m not gonna run away from that anymore.”

Still smiling, Toori spoke saying “You know what?”

He passed his gaze once over all of them before prefacing further, saying “Alright?”

“After I confess I’ll definitely cause all of you trouble. That’s because I can’t do anything. In any case, I’ll take the blame for everything I try to do after that; or rather...”

A breath.

“It’ll be just like declaring war on the whole world, no matter how I think about it.”

Nobody interrupted the words he uttered with any questions or objections. Everyone just looked at Toori, their expressions firm.

Toori spoke to them.

“Tomorrow is the tenth year after Horizon died. You guys probably don’t remember.”

Therefore...

“Tomorrow, I’ll go to confess. She’s probably different; but in this one year I thought about it a lot, and I know that I love her differently so... I won’t run anymore.”

“Then foolish brother, today’s the day for us to prepare a lot of things. And also...today’s our last normal day?”

“That’s right,” Toori said with a smile.

“Relax, Sis. I can’t do anything, but... I won’t forget to aim high.”

At that moment. A hand tapped his shoulder from behind.

“Mm?”

The area behind Toori, which he had just turned to face...

Oriotorai was standing there, a very still expression in her eyes. She was lightly tapping her right foot.

Yet, uncaring about the movements of her fist, Toori gave her a thumbs up.

“Sensei! Did you hear what I just said!? My embarrassing story!”

“Mm? When humans reach the peak of anger, the noises around them become inaudible. What do you think about that?”

“Hey, hey, Sensei, you should seriously listen to what your students are saying. It’s kinda pitiful, so I’ll say it one more time.”

“Alright?” Toori prefaced again, saying this to Oriotorai with a serious face.

“...When the uneventful today ends, and tomorrow becomes today, I’m going to confess. Please remember, all right?”

“Alright, you’ve gotten the death flag—!”

The next instant, Oriotorai opened a hole in the office’s wall with a spin kick.

Because the hole was something created by Toori’s impact as he had been blown away spinning by the kick, it appeared to be the character ‘大’.

•

In the midst of the shopping street that lay in the middle of Tama, the racket coming from Takao beyond the bow could be heard. It was not the sound of spells or shooting that had been heard up till then, but there was an abundance of the sound of swords clashing and ringing. It was the sound of group close-combat practice.

The residents of the commercial street who heard these noises were cleaning up the straw and fragments that had been scattered by the battle on the rooftops. There were bills for the Academy in the inner reaches of the stores and the topic amongst them was in the stage of whether or not to overcharge them.

The tourists that had been watching the din happily started to show themselves, heading towards the roads.

The town started to come to life.

The middle of the town where people had started to come and go and sound sprung forth.

That was where the white haired automaton, P-01s, stood.

She was wearing the café’s apron, controlling two brooms with gravity control so as to clean the storefront. She nodded her head towards the female shopkeeper’s calls which came from within the shop; but her eyes were distant, looking towards Shinagawa.

“Waaah,” a group of desperate battle-cries could be heard from the direction P-01s was facing.

Above her head, in the one direction where the segmentation of the sky

appeared to be lessening, the surroundings of Musashi looked to be dyed with white. In order to pass above the rural land, Musashi shifted into stealth-flight and started to interrupt its sensory information.

Musashi would soon arrive at Mikawa.

●History●



"Sis! Sis! It's 'cause I'm pretty smart, so for the sake of getting smarter teach me a lot of things, alright!? This time I'm a little mixed up about the relationship between the Far East and other countries, so show it to me clearly!"



"Guess I can't help it... If I say it simply, it would be something like this."

■ Flow of History

- Former Earth Age: People abandoned the Earth, which had a deteriorating environment.
- ↓
- People returned from space to the Divine States as Gods.
- ↓
- The environment of Earth had over-recovered, becoming unforgiving; and as many people returned that led to problems with the allocation of the territories.
- ↓
- The Harmonic World was created in a Different Space, and each country decided whether to move there. However, only the people of the Divine States decided to remain in the Real World.
- ↓
- With the wish for the history of humanity to go well, the history book of the Former Earth Age, the Testament was made. It holds the function of automatically renewing with the information of the next century.
- ↓
- The people separated between the two worlds recreated the history of the Testament, advancing until the Middle Ages.
- ↓
- However, the Harmonic World was annihilated by an after-effect of the history recreation in the Real World (Divine States).
- ↓
- Because of the Harmonic Unification War, the Divine States warred against the other countries. The Divine States changed its name to the Far East.
- ↓
- Each country placed an Academy at the head of their government and military, creating the Testament Union; and they took control of the Far East.
- ↓
- 1548, a century ago, the Testament's history description did not automatically renew its descriptions after 1648.
- ↓
- And now, the present after a century, 1648. With the renewal of the Testament still in its halted state, it is being wondered whether or not this year the Apocalypse will occur.



"Something like this. If you comprehend, then say it, all right? How was it?"



"Allrightt! I realllly nonprehend it!"



"Don't use weird language!"

Study: **History**

Toori: “Sis! Sis! It’s ’cause I’m pretty smart, so for the sake of getting smarter teach me a lot of things, alright!? This time I’m a little mixed up about the relationship between the Far East and other countries, so show it to me clearly!”

Kimi: “Guess I can’t help it... If I say it simply, it would be something like this.”

■ **Flow of History**

- Former Earth Age: People abandoned the Earth, which had a deteriorating environment.



- People returned from space to the Divine States as Gods.



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Kimi: "Something like this. If you comprehend, then say it, all right? How was it?"

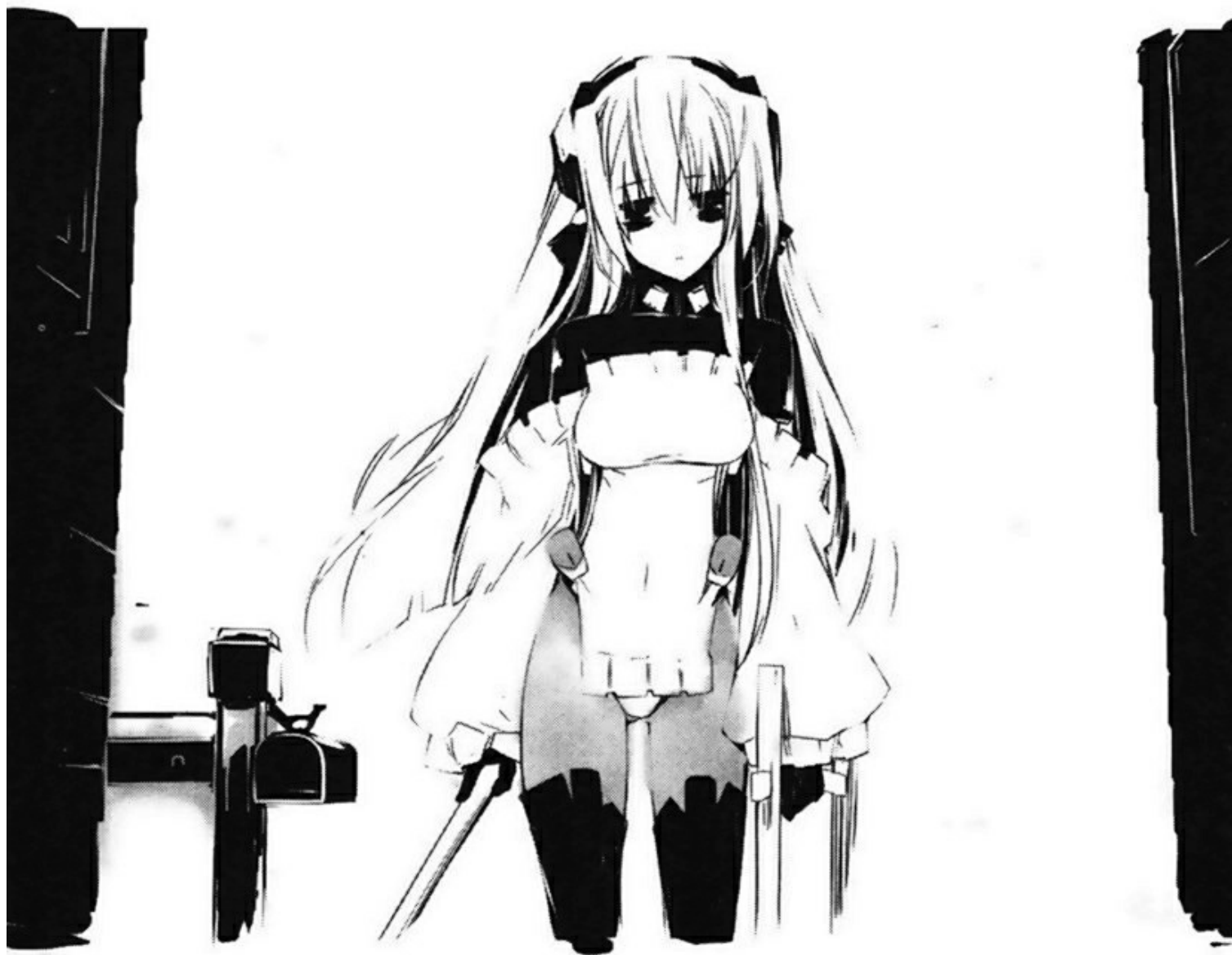
Toori: "Alllrightt! I realllly nonprehend it!"

Kimi: "Don't use weird language!"

Chapter 01: Participants in a Chance Meeting by the Storefront

CHAPTER 1

"Participants in a Chance Meeting by the Storefront"



Your life exists.
In order to meet.
What then, does a meeting mean?

Point Allocation (Life)

Your life exists

In order to meet

What then, does a meeting mean

Point Allocation (Life)

•

Below the white sky, the mid-morning flows of people that streamed through the streets of Musashi were coming to an end.

Everywhere in the town people were transitioning to their work, which stretched from early morning to noon.

In the vicinity of central Tama, the café Blue Thunder had also entered into its pre-midday preparations. A string with a sign attached to it closed off the entrance to the eating area. Only the bakery section of the shop, which made use of the bread rack in front of the counter, remained open.

However, it was still too early for the morning to truly move into “pre-midday”. The female shopkeeper was still setting up inside the store.

“P-01s, you can leave once you clean da front of da shop with water. I’ll be expectin’ you in the evenin’.”

“Judge.”

P-01s nodded and left the counter, moving outside.

There was a large road. The finishing touches to the roadtop had already been completed; the road was a place where people would pass by. Occasionally a two-wheeled wagon or carriage would pass by, shaking the road and the materials that made it up.

It was the time for work, but tourists could be seen here and there.

“Judging from the situation, we will soon be at Mikawa. The city is coming alive.”

P-01s muttered. Using her personal functions P-01s thought of Mikawa, which she had not seen for so long.

...Once every year they came to Mikawa, the site of her beginning.

Musashi takes one year to circle the island of the Far East once. It docks at the residential areas scattered everywhere, delivering and selling goods; but according to the shopkeepers even one year was not enough to circle the Far East.

P-01s thought of the words “last year”.

It seemed that P-01s had boarded Musashi from Mikawa last year.

...When she had first realized it, she was standing in one of Tama’s roads.

Someone had registered her as a citizen. She was allowed life due to the fact that the proof of citizenship that she carried was real and because the shopkeeper of the café had called out to her in the beginning and became her guardian.

What P-01s was thinking of now was the question that she had kept in her mind since then: *...Where does the product P-01s come from?*

The shopkeeper had talked with businesses and offices multiple times, but she was not one of their products. Neither were there any lost items nor missing person requests for an automaton.

“I can see IZUMO’s or the English method in your construction...but much still remains unclear.”

This was according to the technician who had examined her. When she heard “much still remains unclear,” the shopkeeper had tilted her head; but what the technician was saying referred to the fact that automatons were amalgamations of ability and machinery, and though they are industrial products there is a lot of secrecy involved in their construction. In other words, she was an amalgamation of obscurity. Furthermore, the technician said this: “Her soul is in her throat.”

She heard that automatons were dolls in which human souls resided.

Dolls did not move by themselves; but when souls that were able to absorb ether (the power of the ley lines) resided in dolls, they set drive systems and other similar mechanisms moving.

In her case, a component that seemed like a soul existed in her throat at the

base of her voice box.

“The thoughts and emotions of some great lady somewhere probably live in dat ornament.”

This was according to the shopkeeper; but the truth was unknown to her.

What she knew was that she was an automaton without memories of her owner.

“— —”

P-01s brought her hand to face the tap in front of the shop, beside the door.

Using gravity control, she moved the pail under the tap without touching it.

Gravity control was a racial power unique to automatons. It was a necessary power for souls that resided in something to be able to move that in which it resided to make contact with its surroundings, so automatons by nature principally used this power to serve people.

Placing her body close towards the road, she filled the pail beyond her outstretched hands with water and pulled it closer to her.

She took it.

She splashed water on the path using a ladle.

This was something she always did: Once every morning, once before noon, and once in the evening.

A routine that always was. A job that she always did. Something that she should always do. It was something that she could do without her having to think of what exactly she was, so it was something for which she was thankful.

...Speaking bluntly, I can guess that I am merely escaping.

The moment she thought of this...

A voice could be heard.

“Water.”

Small, black, round things were piling up from out of the ground at the edge of the road.

“Want water.”

•

With the pail of water in hand, P-01s approached the direction from which the voices came: The corner of the store’s lot. The gutters by the roadside.

Because it was connected with the sewage system, wooden lids always covered the gutters. However, when she lifted up the lids a black, round thing around five centimeters across poked out from below.

Its black figure looked like a clump of fur that had been matted with muddy water.

...However, according to their personal statements they were algae.

Like a creature of some sort, the algae clung to the edge of the gutter with the bottom of its spherical body. It used its sensory organ to look around the area.

“Are we okay? All clear?”

“It’s okay. All clear.”

P-01s nodded.

The black algae that lay before P-01s’s eyes, the black algae creature, was a hive mind organism that worked in Musashi and many other cities to treat the sewage. They consumed the “dirtiness” with photosynthesis, purifying it into “cleanliness”. Because of this all the countries had formed contracts with the black algae creatures’ hive mind, supplying them with food in exchange for sewage treatment.

That was what these black algae creatures did; but every time they soaked in the sewage, they would be covered with it. The spilled sewage could be decomposed by the chemicals that leaked from the black algae creatures, but the same could not be done for the smell.

They knew that if they came out from the sewers and gutters people would hate them.

Despite this, they came here. There was a reason for this.

“Water.”

“Has the sewage stagnated again?”

“Yes, again, a little; but some water will do it.”

Looking at it, the black algae’s body was slightly dry. P-01s judged that it was lacking water.

This was an area where the sewer pipes twisted. Because each ship of the Musashi was gigantic, the inner components fought an eternal battle attempting to find a way to absorb the deformities of the outer shell.

...The central area is where the most creases took shape. Speaking further, this is the surface level which is the least supported of all the levels. This was the reason there were so many ships where the center of the surface level was hollowed out.

The black algae creatures wanted their food, the sewage. However, because the flow of the sewage had slowed down, stagnated and gotten stuck, someone had to use a brush to force out the stagnation and blockage.

Originally, this task should have been the responsibility of one of the managers in the public offices.

“Nobody does others probably serious.”

“—Judge, I understand.”

P-01s poured water onto the black algae creature.

Narrowing its sensory organ eyes, it let the water seep in fully.

“Thanks.”

It twisted below the gutter. The next one came out.

“One more please.”

P-01s nodded and poured water on it.

The next came, and the next. This continued as they kept coming.

“Last.”

The seventh of them bathed in the water. The seventh creature thanked her

and made to dive into the gutter. But differently from the others, it said this before diving inside.

“Okay?”

“What is okay?”

“Smells right?”

Having been asked this, P-01s tilted her head to the side. There was a smell. It was the smell of sewage. Because they were sticking their bodies slightly out from below the gutter, only she had noticed; but if the black algae creatures came out completely, the surrounding stores would notice. The truth was clear. Therefore, P-01s said this: “Judge, to speak bluntly, it stinks.”

“Why?”

The black algae creature asked why, given that it smelled, she talked with them.

“Always helping but others until now got in trouble said no why?”

P-01s immediately answered this question.

“Your smell is not something that is given off because you are trying to hurt others. It is originally a smell that P-01s and the others created. You do not completely come out of the gutters, making sure that the smell does not spread. Speaking bluntly, because of this... P-01s has no reason to deny you.”

So, the black algae creature said:

“Friend?”

“Judge, if that is what you call a relationship where two beings acknowledge each other.”

Hearing P-01s’s words, the black algae creature remained silent for a moment. However, after a few seconds the creature said this: “Name please.”

“...I am called P-01s.”

“Thanks for always.”

The black algae creature compressed its body, as if to nod.

“Wash hands please.”

The creature left and the lid to the gutter closed.

P-01s raised her previously lowered hips. Just like the black algae creature had said, she rinsed her hands with the leftover water. She checked that the surroundings were not dirtied, but the black algae creatures had also absorbed the sewage that they had leaked.

As if in its stead, a figure fell.

“?”

The figure was a human. The black male school uniform was that of the Musashi Ariadust Academy.

“——”

However, the slender frame of the figure with fairly long black hair swayed before suddenly falling to the ground. The figure fell flat, but the knees did not hit the ground.

A thump rang out and a cloud of dust rose up.

...Does the fact that a cloud of dust rose up imply that not enough water has been spread over the ground?

Thinking this, P-01s called out the store.

“Shopkeeper, there is a customer. To speak of what she looks like, Masazumi-sama is as always...on the brink of starving to death.”

●Musashi●



"Sis! Sis! It may be a little late, but what is Musashi's formation!?"

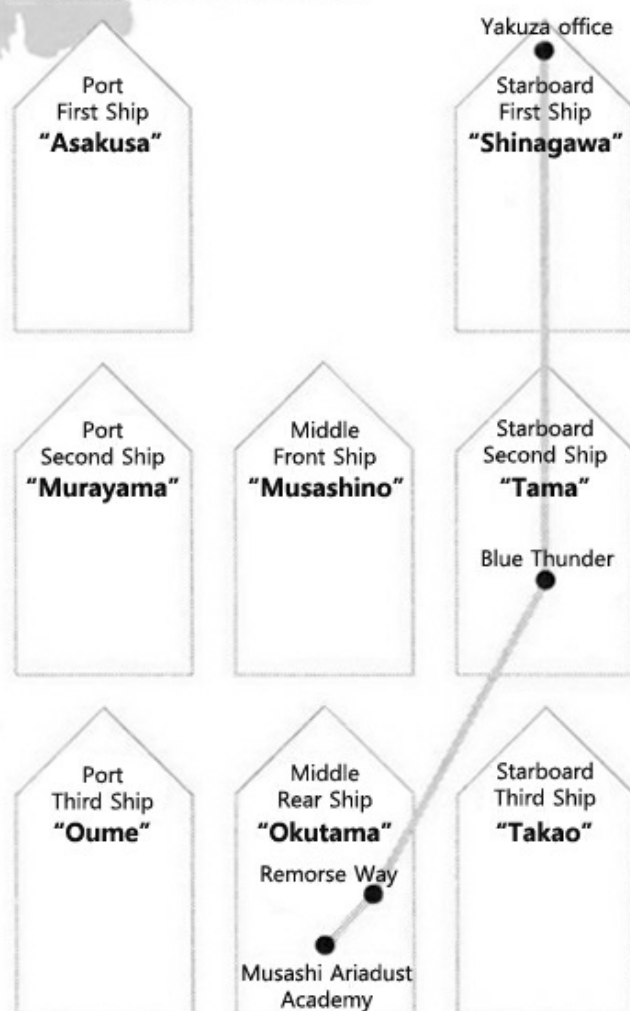


"Fufufu idiot brother, you're always walking around the ship and don't know even that...?! Umm...your intelligent sister was about to use inappropriate language!"



"Hey, hey Sis, don't turn into a heretic and just tell me quickly!"

■Musashi's ships formation



※The line shows the way everyone took in the prologue.

·Musashi can only travel between the borders of each country.



"Well, the eight ships look like this. Basically, the first ships are used for carrying cargo. The second ships are for tourism and are mostly made up of people who were born in foreign countries, besides administrative offices and embassies. The third ships contain the people from the Far East and is the place that focus on our industries. The middle-front ship is the center of the operation and control of Musashi. The middle-rear ship has the Academy as its center."



"Heh! I'm surprised that Sis knew that much! You're a genius!"



"No, you see, I'm really a genius, but it's seriously bad that you didn't know this!"

Study: **Musashi**

Toori: “Sis! Sis! It may be a little late, but what is Musashi’s formation!?”

Kimi: “Fufufu idiot brother, you’re always walking around the ship and don’t know even that...?! Umm...your intelligent sister was about to use inappropriate language!”

Toori: “Hey, hey Sis, don’t turn into a heretic and just tell me quickly!”

- **Musashi’s ships formation**

| | Left side | Middle | Right side |
|--------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| First ships | “Asakusa” | | “Shinagawa” |
| Second ships/Front | “Murayama” | “Musashino” | “Tama” |
| Third ships/Rear | “Oume” | “Okutama” | “Takao” |

- Musashi can only travel along the borderlines of each country.
 - The line shows the route everyone took in the prologue. Names of the places starting from the bottom: Musashi Ariadust Academy (“Okutama”) -> Remorse Way (“Okutama”) -> Blue Thunder (“Tama”) -> Yakuza office (“Shinagawa”)

Kimi: “Well, the eight ships look like this. Basically, the first ships are used for carrying cargo. The second ships are for tourism and are mostly made up of people who were born in foreign countries, besides administrative offices and embassies. The third ships contain the people from the Far East and is the place that focus on our industries. The middle-front ship is the center of the operation and control of Musashi. The middle-rear ship has the Academy as its center.”

Toori: “Heh! I’m surprised that Sis knew that much! You’re a genius!”

Kimi: “No, you see, I’m really a genius, but it’s seriously bad that you didn’t know this!”

Chapter 02: The Wrecking Crew in the Classroom

CHAPTER 2

"The Wrecking Crew in the Classroom"



Class continues until the bell rings.
But if the bell is broken.
What then of class?

Point Allocation (Classroom)

Class continues until the bell rings

But if the bell is broken

What then of class

Point Allocation (Classroom)

•

There existed a wooden classroom.

The view outside the classroom's windows was filled with the white sky. The classroom itself was on the aerial ship Musashi. It was a classroom of Musashi Ariadust Academy.

Though it was a rather small classroom, there were not even 20 students in it. The back of the classroom was rather empty.

A short female teacher stood in front of the blackboard. A nametag with "Sanyou" written upon it was attached to her. With a world history book in hand, she was speaking.

"...Well then; in the past, humanity descended to the Earth from the heavens. More specifically to this land, the Far East. But because the planet's environment was inhospitable to the people, humanity was unable to leave the Far East. As such, humanity copied the Far East to a different space, doubling the amount of land; whereupon they started to live in the real world and the Harmonic World. At the time, they questioned whether they would be able to ascend to the heavens like the humanity of old. Therefore, humanity proposed an idea. If they repeated the same history as humanity of old, they would definitely be able to ascend to the heavens. The thing they made for this purpose was..."

A breath. Sanyou touched her chalk to the previously untouched blackboard.

"...the Testament. The history book that covers each and every aspect of the Former Earth Age's history."

•

She rapped the blackboard and circled the word "Testament" twice to emphasize it.

“People currently believe that if we follow the same history as humanity in the past, we will be able to reach the heavens again. They created the Seven Compositions with the Old Testament, which records history Before Christ; and the New Testament, which records the history of Anno Domini.”

Sanyou continued to write the words: “A Walkthrough to History”. As she did so, she spoke.

“However, when the future became clear there were people who read of coming events in order to gain power. As such, humanity rendered the information of the Testament unreadable; all except the events of the coming century. Yet they could not leave the renewal of the display of information to people. To solve this they used the ley lines, which govern all things, to bind the Testament with fate.”

Sanyou turned to face the class. Their faces, lined up in a row before her, were frowning.

Faced with this, Sanyou bathed in their confused stares.

...This is bad. Looks like fate and things are pretty hard to understand... I guess I shouldn't mention the Excerpt?

As her mind started to fall into panic, Sanyou recalled the things she had studied at home last night. She drew a deep breath.

“What do you think fate is? What do you think, Abe-kun?”

She tried asking one of the male students. Having been asked this, he suddenly spoke with a timid voice.

“...Marriage?”

...Is he being sarcastic because a man ran away from me a few days before?

Sanyou felt her heart freeze for an instant. However, laughs spilled out from around the boy. The other students turned to the student who had answered and shouted what had decidedly become his nickname.

“Hey, Marriage Man!”

Seeing the class's atmosphere become lively, Sanyou smiled wryly.

“Um, the reason he thought that fate is the same thing as marriage is because marriage is...”

“Inescapable,” she began to say.

“I-i-ines...escaping me over and over... Goddammit, God failed when he made a character like me!”

“S-Sanyou-sensei! Don’t get so agitated by reality!!”

These noisy brats, they think that anyone can get married just because they’re young; but I’m still 24... Yeah, I’m still 24...still. I’m within the accepted range of ‘still’. I’m not even halfway through a life of 50 years.

Sanyou forced down the murmurs of her heart for the moment.

“Anyway, fate is inescapable.”

Everyone nodded, looking at Sanyou with an inexplicably sympathetic gaze, but she chose to ignore it.

“Um,” she started to speak again.

“We learned that fate exists during the Divine Age. We also know that it is fundamentally changeable. It is explicitly because of fate’s existence that things begin and end. It is commonly accepted that we can access it through the ley lines, which govern all things in the same manner as time and space.”

“The people of the past linked the renewal of the Testament with fate, which will continue to flow as long as the world exists. Matching with the flow of fate, the Testament shows us the history of the coming century.”

While speaking, she started to write on the blackboard.

“As regards to the recreation of history, the Testament was given the same status as the principal scripture of the Former Earth Age. However, because gods truly existed in the age when humanity ascended, to the humans who had returned all Christian religions lost their status. Therefore in history creation, the Christian religions do not worship God...”

She wrote.

•**They believe in the Testament’s history recreation itself.**

“...This is how things have turned out. In religions like Shinto where multiple gods are necessary, they responded to the new knowledge by shifting the gods’ domains from the gods in the ascension age.

Because of the fact that gods exist and the belief in the Testament, religious organizations and groups are known as Testamental religions or Testamental conventions; and believers are called Musicians... In the Far East, Shinto is more accurately described as the Shinto faith, and shrines are Shinto conventions. Consequently, people who are able to use its power are Shinto Musicians.”

This was not all.

“The majority of Testamental religions outside of the Far East are just the backwards reading of the names of their counterparts of the Former Earth Age. This connotes the fact that they are truly different from their counterparts in the Former Earth Age; but the origin stems from the people who had moved to the Altered Space ‘The Harmonic World’. They read the name backwards because they took the meaning of its inverse as a blessing, that they would one day be able to leave this different world like they had in the past.

“The Testament-worshipping Tsirhc denomination and its variant, the Mlasi domination, kept the backwards reading even after leaving the Harmonic Divine States to avoid the confusion that would result from a change. The current principal Testament religions are...”

- **Pro-Testament. Tsirhc branches:**

- **Sion:** Primarily demons. They favor the Old Testament. Nomadic race.
- **Catholic:** Mainly K.P.A Italia, Tres España, and Hexagone Française. Worships saints.
- **Protestant:** M.H.R.R. Favors the entire Testament. Subdued but very good at commerce.
- **Orthodoxia:** Sviet Rus. Favors holy paintings. Russian interpretation of Catholicism.
- **Anglican Church:** Mainly England. Divorce is legal. Officially Protestant but inclines towards Catholic.

- **Pro-Testament Offshoot:**

- **Mlasi:** Mainly the Middle-East. Five prayers every day and a month of fasting.

- **Non-Testament**

- **Dunhi^[1]:** India. The cycle of life and death. Curry.
- **Oat^[2]:** China. Full of sages. Ramen.
- **Shintoism:** The 800,000 gods of the Far East. Unexpectedly spontaneous.
- **Buddhism:** Far East's version of the path of Samsara. Packed with many spells.

“Well, looking at those who live in Musashi, everyone is basically Shinto. If someone isn't, people mostly don't care as long as they're not involved.”

Sanyou continued to speak.

“Humanity started to repeat the history of the Former Earth Age which had been described in the Testament. Of course they retired and cared for the broken peoples and leaders who had died, also following up on their behalf. The majority of wars were also agreed upon, and they came with guarantees. So in the beginning things were compressed in this manner; but recreation formally started at 0 AD.”

Sanyou thought for a moment, looking at the class's speed in copying down the notes on the blackboard. Looking at one, then two, then three, she passed her gaze across the entire class.

...I'm probably going too fast.

She confirmed that the place she was standing, on top of the teaching platform, was not blocking anyone's view. After taking a breath, Sanyou stepped away from the platform and walked amongst the class in order to give

them some time to copy down the notes.

Sanyou reached the back of the classroom.

...Is the order of the curriculum I'm teaching really alright?

She was slightly perplexed.

•

It's really complicated.

A teacher like me thinks so, so what does the class copying down the notes think?

Last year was a failure. In the second year, we started world history with Rome and the Far East's history from the Nara period.

I got too excited about Rome and the Heian period and had to rush through the last half of the course.

...I mean, that part of history is pretty interesting.

Especially when we got to the foundation of Roman Empire; that famous line Julius Caesar spoke to Brutus during his assassination, "You again, Brutus?"^[3] was very memorable. The assassination of key figures leads to their protection through "retirement", and I explained that concept very thoroughly.

Third years have to choose their future career paths, so it was a pretty bad mistake...

This is my third year as a teacher. I had taught the first and second years, so this is my first time teaching third years.

Will it be alright? The future lives of my students really depend on this.

"..."

The class was currently copying down the notes on the board, and the air was filled with tension.

Looking at the class from the back of the classroom, she understood the differences between each one.

The ones born in the Far East and Asia had mainly black hair. There were

occasionally people who had dyed their hair, but their base color was black.

However, this group of students did not make up even half the class. The rest of them had either blonde or brown hair, and there were also students with red and white hair.

...There are also a lot of people that don't have any hair or who, in other words, don't meet the prerequisites to be described as having "hair" at all.

The majority of half-dragons and devils have scales and shells instead of skin, so they don't have hair. The majority of slimes and spirits are the same. Conversely, half-beasts have hair all over their bodies; some in tortoise-shell patterns or stripes, some long and some short. The varieties are rich.

When I look at them, a slight anxiety wells up in my heart.

I was once also one of these people, and we looked like this as well.

...But I feel like our teacher had gotten more of their things together.

As she thought this, there was a sound that crept into her hearing. The voices and the sound came from the class in the classroom next door.

...Third-year Plum Class, Makiko-senpai's class.

Makiko Oriotorai sat next to Sanyou in the faculty's office. To Sanyou, who had moved to this job two years ago, Oriotorai was an existence with which she had enough of an age gap that she could safely refer to their relationship as one between a senior and a junior. Oriotorai often let her observe classes, and she was irregularly reliable when it came to Sanyou's weak areas.

The voice she could hear now belonged to Oriotorai.

"Long story short, right now the capital is being ruled by the P.A. Oda."

No, that's not really true Oriotorai-senpai. The Akechi family of P.A. Oda has acknowledged their own autocracy.

...Makiko-senpai, please take your lecture seriously!

She's teaching them the Far East's history, right?

Sanyou hit the nail right on the head. There were not many teachers in Musashi Ariadust Academy. The lessons were all taught by the class teachers.

Oriotorai's lessons are always noisy, but I'm jealous that she gets along so well with her students.

...I wonder what kind of lesson they're having right now...

The day before, they had a lesson where the losers had to bungee jump. But what I could hear now was Oriotorai and the girls' voices.

"Strip! Strip! Strip!!"

...Seriously, what kind of lesson are they having!?

•

Oriotorai's class was fundamentally based upon a principle of absolute punishment. Her way of teaching was simple.

1: Teach.

2: Ask someone, who is required to respond.

3a: If they cannot answer, they will be punished, but points will not be deducted from them. Nicknamed "execution".

3b: If they can answer, they can gain points corresponding to the punishment that was announced.

Furthermore, each person announces his own punishment at the beginning of each month. The actual contents of the punishment when it needs to be put into practice are, with the exception of the guilty party, discussed by the class and the severity adjusted. As such, favors and connections are important to have beforehand. If they chose a light punishment, it was possible that the conference would increase the weight of the punishment by ten times just for amusement's sake; so none of them could let their guard down.

If the punishment you announced was heavy, then your grades would go up every time you could answer.

In addition, a special characteristic of Oriotorai's class was the "review".

"Alrighty then; the Far East history for today is going to be about the 'Harmonic Unification War', the circumstances leading to the Divine States' provisional occupation."

Oriotorai was sitting in a chair beside the teacher's desk.

"Suzu~ It's fine if you just talk about what you know, so please give us your review."

"Ah? Eh? ...Sensei, ah, um, y-yes. T-The Harmonic Unification War?"

Continuing to face downward, the girl Suzu stood up, her movements panicked. She was blushing.

"A-according to w-what I know...um, in the past the world was divided into the Divine States in reality's world and t-the Harmonic Divine States w-which had been copied over to Altered Space. T-this was done by controlling the ley l-lines. The people of the Divine States lived in the Divine States in reality's world while the people of the other countries lived in the Harmonic Divine States of the different world. They got along p-pretty well, I think; um, is that fine?"

"Yeah, you're fine. To summarize, they recreated the descriptions within the Testament in reality and the other world; all the while thinking of a countermeasure to the harsh environment outside the safe Divine States."

Everyone nodded after Oriotorai spoke. There were some voices that were saying, "You were great!"

Sitting in the window seat of the row of seats all the way to the back, Toori was opening the guide to the game he had bought with a smile on his face.

"Hey, don't worry Bell-san! If things got dangerous, I'd get punched in your stead! It's alright! I'm not gonna die today till I get to the first branch of this eroge, at the very least!"

"You. Please stop saying things that're obvious death flags. Actually, why're you opening up your guide in the middle of class? You're even filling in the survey?"

Hearing Oriotorai's words, Toori raised his voice.

"Huh!? What're you saying, sensei!? I just want the membership special, so please let me go!!"

"Ahaha, yeah, if I could I'd like to seriously let you go...but this is my job."

"D-don't just say it so directly, sensei! Your job!? A job, huh!? I'll say this really

clearly then...adults're dirty!"

Toori stood on top of his chair and pointed at Oriotorai with his two index fingers.

"Is money everything!? Sensei, you're just getting money from the school by teaching classes, aren't you!?"

"I'm pretty sure that that's what being a teacher's about," the class muttered. Despite this, Toori did not show a single sign of caring. He examined the guide, holding it up such that the sunlight passed through it.

"Goddammit, I can't go down the committee president route even if I look through the guide! Also, I can't change the name of the protagonist in this game! I entered in Tenzou's name for my first playthrough, thinking that I'd get a bad end!"

"Why did you choose me, Toori-dono!? I am in charge of blonde girls with big boobs!"

"It's fine, don't worry about it, Tenzou! The second time I'll take a male character's route with Urquiaga's name!"

"You bastard...! We should have decided that I am in charge of older sister characters!"

The treasurer, Shirojiro looked up at their argument. Frowning, he looked at Toori and spoke.

"Be quiet. I'm working right now. For some reason, during this docking we haven't been exporting anything to Mikawa compared to the goods that are coming in. The struggle to reserve warehouses is fierce. Save it for later... Heidi, why are you looking at me like that?"

"Mmm, you know, Shiro-kun, I'm just thinking that we're in class too."



Neshinbara Toussaint



Heidi Augesvarer



Shirojiro Bertoni

“You guys need to shut up...” Neshinbara muttered. But as expected, Toori ignored them. Her eyes still hidden, Suzu spoke, a small smile on her face. After her shoulders stopped their slight tremble, she took a breath.

“Um, i-it’s fine, then?”

Suzu waited for everyone to settle down before speaking.

“It all started with the... Nanboku-chou war.”

•

As they listened to Suzu, the class looked at their textbooks.

The Nanboku-chou war.

“The Far East was called the Divine States at the time. There existed two representatives of the emperor within it, and this war was the struggle between them.”

The true emperor of the Divine States controlled the environmental gods using the Three Sacred Treasures; and by doing so, he managed the ley lines running through the Divine States.

However, the emperor’s role was unrelated to that of the government. They were both man and god, living gods. And they were isolated from all things of this world.

Therefore, it was the task of the representatives that had been acknowledged by the imperial palace to recreate the role of emperor in the Testament’s description of history.

“However, despite reaching a truce with a promise to share power between the north and the south, the northern court broke the promise as described by the Testament’s description of history and didn’t share power, starting their rule as a dictator. And in...1412...? The southern court rebelled. However...”

Suzu clearly spoke these next words.

“The Testament’s description showed that in the year 1443, the southern court would assault the imperial balance and pillage the Divine Tools. And until they were taken back in 1457, control over the ley lines was lost... The Divine

States in the other world, the Harmonic Divine States, lost control of the ley lines which had been supporting Altered Space; and they fell towards the original Divine States.”

“...What happened after it fell?”

“More than half of it completely collapsed and was obliterated. H-however, the remaining portion overwrote and fused with these Divine States, still retaining the weather and other conditions that it had had when it was still part of the other countries. Because of this, there are many p-points where the lands of the Harmonic Divine States exist. T-these are called harmonic territories. Those pillars of a different sky that we see a l-lot, the earth beneath the sky included, are harmonic territories.”

She continued.

“The people of the other countries, who had been living in the Harmonic Divine States before, s-swarmed into the Divine States all at once. Though they were just escaping danger, they had also pinned the blame for the incident onto the Divine States. Battles occurred everywhere. And e-eventually...the Divine States s-surrendered to the invasion forces of the other countries. This was the ‘Harmonic Unification War’. Yet...”

Yet, the other countries did not completely annex the Divine States.

This was because there had been nothing of the like in the Testament’s descriptions.

As such, the countries invaded all of the Divine States, setting up Academies which were training areas for military and political matters. These Academies were made the highest institution of the country. All this was done in order to avoid a coup through military or political means.

“A majority of the Divine States is subjected to provisional occupation by the Academies of the other countries and the Union of the Testament, who controlled the Academies. Currently, the chancellors and Academies of the Far East and the other countries are...”

She had spoken to that point when Oriotorai prompted her.

“Could you tell me about them?”

“Ah, yes.”

Counting them off her fingers, Suzu listed them:

Shimazu — Africa Union — Kyushu: A land of plant-type race beings. Possesses abundant labor force.

Oouchi, Ootomo — Tres España — Shimonoseki: Reigned by Felipe II. A country with great debt as the king invested in developing the New World.

Mouri — Hexagone Française — Chuugoku: Ruled by the up/down duo of Louis XIV and Terumoto Mouri.

Hashiba — M.H.R.R (Holy Roman Empire) — Kinki: Current emperor under house arrest. Catholics and Protestants are in disarray.

Oda — P.A. Oda — Kinki ~ Tokai: Eight years ago, Nobunaga inherited his name and half-seceded from the Testament Union.

Houjou — Alliance of Indian Countries — Tokai ~ Kanto: The long-lived of the Houjou have an automaton-based civilization. They are the ones behind the Alliance.

Uesugi - Sviet Rus - Hokuriku: The Sakra^[4] Raitei-san does a good job in ruling this land with fear.

Aki — K.P.A Italia — Setouchi: Alliances of cities led by the head of the Tsrhc Catholics, the Pope.

Takeda — Qing — Kanto: A large country based around the moving city-states of the elven races.

N/A — England — Floating Island: Ruled by the Fairy Queen Elizabeth. A country of fairies and magical races.

Matsudaira — Far East — Tokai, Kanto: The representative of the Far East. Formed an official alliance with P.A. Oda 10 years ago.

Suzu took a breath.

“A-also, because o-of the rules of history recreation there are still lands that

the T-Testament Union cannot occupy d-due to the fact that they have not been explored yet.”

N/A — Siberia — Touhoku Region - Arctic land sparsely inhabited by unconventional races.

N/A — New World — Hokkaido Region - Mostly uncharted lands, but recently an incipience of potential power is seen there.

N/A — Savage Land — Shikoku Region - Mostly filled with barren harmonic territories. Primarily inhabited by silicon-based races.

Suzu took another breath. Nodding at her, Oriotorai asked her a question.

“Why is that England doesn’t have a corresponding land of the Far East?”

“Ah, j-judge, that’s because... In the Harmonic Divine States, England was Tsushima. It was really small, so I t-think they raised the bottom of the sea. So when the Harmonic Divine States collapsed, t-the island moved w-with it and renewed the ley lines. Because of this, they don’t rule over the Divine States and, u-um, and from a neutral standpoint they act as a bridge between the other countries and the Far East.”

“That’s right, they’re getting the Floating Island and the other countries’ technology from the IZUMO group.”

“Judge,” Suzu nodded, standing there stiffly.

“That’s about right. Much better than if I’d done it. Maybe I’ll ask you next time too~.”

Hearing Oriotorai speak, Suzu loosened her body. She sat down, expelling a breath of relief.

But at the same time, Toori stood up and spoke.

“Sensei, you’re dirty...!”

•

“Eh?”

As everyone turned back to look at him, Toori was pointing at Oriotorai with two fingers.

“That’s dirty, sensei! You’re just egging Bell-san on and asking her to do the next one because you’re an idiot! Adults are seriously stained!! But I’ll point it out! I promise this!”

“...Hey Toori, saying that you’ll confess in the morning and now this...are you really in such a hurry to die?”

“Huh!? There’s no way that I’d want to die, sensei! Or could it be that you’re going to kill me if I confess!? What kind of jealousy is this!? Do you love me that much!? That much!?”

“Ahahaha. This is starting to get seriously old; I’m just going to go past whether or not I love or hate you and say that I wanna kill you.”

“I-is that something a teacher should say to a student, sensei!? Wow, you’re so cool!!”

Toori clapped once. Looking around at everyone, he spoke more politely.

“Well then everyone, we will be gathering tonight to celebrate the night of my confession’s eve! The celebration will be held—”

Not even turning back to look at Toori, Shirojiro said this.

“Don’t even try to go to a place that will cost money. If you choose a place that won’t be covered by our budget, I’ll hang you from the stern.”

“Well, looks like it’s gonna be held here! Maybe we’ll do dares like we did last year!? It’s kinda outta season, I guess.”

“...Um, Toori-kun, this might not be the best time.”

Frowning, Asama had raised her hand. She summoned Hanami and opened up torii signframes around her. Each of the signframes were filled with statistics.

“The rate of incidence of phenomena is increasing as compared to the previous year. If we do dares, they might seriously happen.”

“Then let’s have an exorcism!”

Toori spoke to Asama as she tilted her head in puzzlement.

“There’s a lot of us that have those kinds of skills, right? So...let’s exorcise the school grounds tonight so those kinds of things won’t happen! If there’s something that’s evil, we can exorcise it. You’re fine with it if we go to school to do that, right sensei? It’ll be like one of the student council activities!”

“Mmm... I was actually thinking that it was about time to be doing that.”

“Is that so?”

Having been asked this by Asama, whose twin-colored eyes were opened wide, Oriotorai shrugged and nodded.

“I mean, the Seven Mysteries are a part of every Academy, aren’t they? Judging from the rate of phenomena now, the teachers are worrying that such things might even happen here.”

“Then if you leave it to us...”

“It’d take money if you asked someone else to do it, right? It’s not like phenomena are actually occurring. But well, we were thinking that we should probably investigate beforehand. So I volunteered for the night watch just in case.”

“Then it’s decided. We’ll do it! It’ll be a ‘ghost hunt’!”

“Yeah. I’ll allow it, so make sure you patrol around at night and replace the charms on the nameplates of all the classrooms in my stead. If there’s a shrine at the classroom, please worship it. I’ll take care of the sacred sake that I bought with my own money to cleanse the school.”

“Y-you’re the worst teacher ever!!”

“Well, I bought it for a good purpose, you know? Ghosts do exist after all, and there’re some in the school that act as guardian spirits. The fact that there’re shrines and charms above the entrances to every room is proof that they exist. Even if you can’t see them, they’re here. To respect these ‘Nobodies’ and accompany them are the rules. Even if they come out, unless they’re evil spirits, just act like everything’s normal. Is that fine?”

She folded her arms again and spoke further. She gestured towards Toori with

her chin.

“Well then Toori, it’s time for your punishment.”

•

Hearing Oriotorai, everyone fell silent.

At the end of the class’s questioning gaze, Oriotorai scratched her head.

“Remember Suzu’s explanation? The northern court started its dictatorship in 1413. It was a small mistake.”

Suzu shrunk back, a soft exclamation on her lips. Seeing this, Oriotorai waved her hand lightly.

“Well, it’s fine, you were more than able to make up for it in your explanation after. And there’s no punishment when you fail in the ‘review’. But...there was an idiot that said he’d get punched in your stead, right?”

Oriotorai picked up the notebook of the attendance record that was lying on top of the teacher’s table. She checked its contents.

“...The punishment that Toori announced this month is...to strip.”

“Uwaaaah! Did I write something softcore like that!? I should’ve written something super hardcore from the start...or maybe I should say bigcore!”

Toori stood up and shouted, a grin on his face.

Everyone thought for a moment. After a little while, the class said this.

“Then, if the punishment is to strip...”

•

“Strip! Strip! Strip!”

Sanyou heard these voices from the neighboring classroom. After a small pause, she also heard cheers of praise.

...Eh? Does that mean someone stripped!? Is that really alright!? Like, isn’t that like child #@\$!?*

“Wow...!”

...O-one more!?

“Woow...!”

...What!? W-wait a moment...

Sanyou looked at the male students who were earnestly copying down the notes on the board.

The male uniform of the Far East was constructed in this manner.

...Umm, a jacket, a shirt, pants, and underwear...altogether four pieces. There had been three cheers just now, so...

“Whaaaa...!?”

...Why’s the fourth time a question...!?

The instant after she thought this...

The wall to her left and the lockers up against it were broken through in a ‘大’ shape, and a naked boy came tumbling in.

•

The sound of splintering accompanied the wooden fragments of the lockers and debris flying through the air.

“—!!”

The boys that had been copying down notes stood up, and the girls rocked backward.

The nude boy who had come flying in rolled three times before he flew into the back row of the rows of desks. However, he only sent a few seats flying because the students that had been at the point of impact had scrambled out of the way. To describe his movements, he smashed into a desk and was sent into the air, impacting the remainder of the desks with his limp body.

The sound of destruction echoed, and the chairs that had been sent spinning through the air fell to the ground and rolled.

All that was left was the desks and chairs, left fallen and bent.

And silence.

But after a while the girls brought their hands to their cheeks, looking at the

nude boy on the floor; who was lying spread-eagle, just like the character ‘大’.

Their first reaction was to pull their bodies back. The next moment, they said this in unison:

“Ahhhhh...!!! Sensei! Sensei! ...It’s a pervert! The pervert Chancellor’s spinning around!!”

Sanyou heard the cries of the students, but because everything had happened so suddenly, her mind was left in a state of incomprehension. She thought this:

...Yes, I can see that too. He was spinning. Vertically too.

“S-Sensei! Please do something!!”

Eh? Sanyou thought. There was a nude boy lying face-down in front of her. His butt was in clear view.

...But...what? W-what do you...want me to do about this...?

Sanyou wiped at the sweat that clung to her whole body. In the special classes she had taken in order to become qualified as a teacher, or in her three years of experience as a teacher, she had no memory of learning about how to deal with a spinning pervert who burst through a wall.

But all around her were eyes swimming in confusion and the expectation that the teacher, being older than them, would take care of this for them.

They were all looking at her.

Being the object of so many gazes, the amount of sweat dripping down Sanyou’s back increased.

...The students! The students are expecting things of me that they’ve never expected before; but like I thought, this is too much...!

Answering my student’s hopes and dealing with a pervert...can these two things be thought of on the same wavelength?

But she was the person responsible for this classroom. Therefore Sanyou approached the fallen nude, keeping her body low by pulling her hips back. In between the splinters of wood that had scattered everywhere and the fallen chairs and desks, there lay the butt of the fallen nude.

The butt did not move.

...Then...

She got closer to him in order to check if he was still alive. She lowered her body and took a breath.

“U-um...”

“Wooooooooooooooah, that was seriously surprising...! Would a normal teacher seriously kick her student!!”

The nude sprung up with the force of a spring-loaded doll and turned to face Sanyou.

His hips were thrust right before Sanyou’s eyes, as she was squatting down.

“Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!”

She screamed in reflex.

“Huh?” The nude said. Putting a hand on his hips, he twisted them to the left and right.

“Hey, isn’t it Sanyou-sensei!? Why’re you screaming like that!? Did something weird happen!? Please tell me! I’ll solve anything for you!!”

“Hyaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!”

The moment she screamed, the nude was impaled from behind by a longsword in its sheath and he toppled to the ground.

•

Immediately reviving from the blow, Toori looked at Sanyou who had been grabbed from behind by Oriotorai.

Oriotorai was speaking to Sanyou right before his eyes. Sanyou’s breathing was ragged and tears were spilling from her eyes.

“It’s alright, it’s fine Mitsuki...just calm down, OK?”

“Yeah Sanyou-sensei! If you don’t stop crying then we’ll be seriously troubled!! Here, just take a look.”

He had thrust out his hips; but looking at his groin you could not see skin, just

a square bundle of light.

“Look, Sanyou-sensei! Through Amaterasu’s optical divine musical technique which can manipulate sources of light, I can make use of optical camouflage! Or in English, God Mosaic! Shiro’s prepared a whole bunch of charms for me, and I do a lot of stripping; so no matter what kind of massive damage I take I’m fine due to the power of the Idiot Spell!”

“Ah, no, um, rather than that...”

Sanyou’s gaze rested on Aoi’s left shoulder.

“Um...is your left shoulder alright?”

“Huh? Ahh, this.”

There was a scar on his left shoulder. Wide and thick, it traced a curve down towards his side before circling back; the legacy of a laceration five centimeters in width.

Toori raised his left arm, showing it to Sanyou.

“It happened a reeeeeaaaally long time ago. Since it was so far back, the scar got bigger as I got bigger. That’s all.”

Toori nodded at her. After a while, Sanyou nodded back, faltering only a little.

A figure clambered through the gaping hole in the wall. It was Heidi.

Heidi looked around for just a moment, taking in the debris on the floor before counting something off on her fingers.

“...Righty. Well then, sensei, Azuma-kun’s arrived, you know? He’s walking through the courtyard right now.”

“...Heidi. You calculated the price of repairs, didn’t you?”

“Hmm?” Heidi smiled.

“The Bertoni Company is backing DYI ventures after all. If we settle this using the school’s repair fees, we’d be in really big trouble. Should I make arrangements now?”

“Yeah, yeah.” Oriotorai nodded. Seeing this, Toori asked her a question.

“Sensei, he’s coming back?”

“Yeah, but rather than that, please get on some clothes and think about how we’re going to fix this.”

“How to fix it?” Toori muttered. He noticed that in one of the classroom’s containers, which lay on top of the lockers, there were scrolls of Japanese paper that were used in writing classes.

“How to fix it...”

Murmuring it again, Toori took one of the scrolls and held it up to Sanyou and Oriotorai.

“Won’t it be alright if we cover it with this? It’d be like a massive sliding door. What do you think, Sensei?”

“I guess.” Oriotorai said, as Toori unrolled the scroll of Japanese paper in front of her.

Spreading it wide with his hands, Toori slid the paper between his legs, effectively straddling it. With his next motion, he wedged the paper between his butt and groin, pulling it up and squeezing it tight. Having done this, he rolled it back up.

“Then with this...”

“Wait a second, what the hell did you just do!? Didn’t you just do something really weird!?”

“Huh!? What are you talking about, sensei!? Just leave me alone! I’m by myself!!”

“Um, Toori-kun, Sensei... I think Azuma-kun’s about to arrive.”

“Ah,” Oriotorai said, lifting her head. Releasing her hold on Sanyou, she looked at Toori, eyes narrowed.

“You’re going to be in the same class as Azuma starting today, so don’t tell him anything weird. After all, he’s—”

“I got it,” Toori answered with a smile. Standing in front of Sanyou and Oriotorai, whose narrowed eyes were fixed upon him, he was still completely

nude.

“He’s the emperor’s child after all... There’s no way I’d do anything strange.”

After he finished speaking voices could be heard from Plum Class, the neighboring classroom.

“Sensei! Azuma’s arrived!! And so has the king!!”

Hearing this, Oriotorai sighed. She lightly tapped her shoulders with the hilt of her longsword.

“After they’ve greeted everyone Azuma and the king’ll come here. I’d like to do something about the wall before they do...”

Looking at the classroom’s clock, its needles indicating that it was directly before noon, Oriotorai said this.

“At this time today, Masazumi’s probably on break. Well, she’s escorting President Sakai to Mikawa as the representative of the student council, so it’s not like she’s just absent... I wonder what she’s up to now.”

● Musashi's Administrative Divisions ●



"Sis! Sis! Teach us about... uhh, what was it called? Mu-Muchachi's A...Aninstrative... Invasions! Ah, that last part sounds erotic!"



"Fufufu, my foolish brother, your super forced joke is simply wonderful. Musashi's Administrative Divisions, then?"



"...C'mon, Sis. Getting down to topic already? I thought you would play along with me for a bit longer. You're quite the killjoy."



"And you're so noisy. I'm going to start the explanation now, so sit there like a good boy and listen."

■ Musashi's Internal Politics Division

·Academy (Chancellor's Officers, Student Council and Student Committee)
:Authority split into Executive, Judicial, and Legislative power divisions.

·Provisional Council (Assembly of Academy's influential alumni)
:Leaders of the bureaucrats that assist the Academy in making and executing decisions.

·King of Musashi (Yoshinao)
:Has the management rights for Musashi, and can veto the Academy's decisions.



"The Academy is regarded as the heart of the nation, so the members of the student committee were originally the bureaucrats. But in the Far East attendance isn't unlimited like the other countries. We graduate at 18 years of age, so a bureaucratic organization that doesn't have the power to make or pass motions, the Provisional Council, was made. And then...well, Musashi's King is a division specific to Musashi. The other countries don't have someone that can veto like the Musashi's King."



"What happens if there is one?"



"In other words, there will be someone who can stop you if you make a crazy decision. The kings from other countries aren't nuts like you, that's why they don't need one."



"...Hey, someone, anyone, listen up... This sister of mine is really incredible sometimes."

Study: **Musashi's Administrative Divisions**

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Kimi: "Fufufu, my foolish brother, your super forced joke is simply wonderful. Musashi's Administrative Divisions, then?"

Toori: "...C'mon, Sis. Getting down to topic already? I thought you would play along with me for a bit longer. You're quite the killjoy."

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Toori: "What happens if there is one?"

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Chapter 03: Innocents at the Table

CHAPTER 3

"Innocents at the Table"



To be indecisive is to think overmuch.
And to question whether to stay silent or continue to speak.
But then, where can you find the answer?

Point Allocation (Resolution)

To be indecisive is to think overmuch

And to question whether to stay silent or continue to speak

But then, where can you find the answer?

Point Allocation (Resolution)

•

A space existed, into which the light of morning's end gently entered.

Two thick tables of wood were installed here. It was a café, with a kitchen installed deeper inside.

At the entrance of the store there was a wooden signboard with the symbol of Blue Thunder engraved upon it.

The sign that indicated that the shop was still in the preparation stage was hanging over the entrance-way, but there were two silhouettes standing inside the store.

One was the female shopkeeper, baking the bread that would be needed in the afternoon and evening in the kitchen deep inside.

The other was a student, who had brought one of the chairs placed upon the eating hall's tables to the floor and was eating.

The student was wearing a male uniform.

Under the fairly long black hair, her fairly sharp eyes were fixed onto the table. Moving her hands, she ate breakfast.

Atop the table, the student's meal consisted only of a few pieces of bread and a glass of water.

"Masazumi-san, I think it would be better if ya worked a part-time job with good pay and ate properly. Just doin' scholarly things won't let ya gain any experience, right? If a girl dressed as a man collapses, she's not going to make any fans."

The student, Masazumi, tore up her bread as she listened. She answered with a voice fairly high in pitch.

"Only my father's acquaintances have realized that I'm a girl... And even at the

Academy, only my teacher and classmates know. Even you didn't notice until you took care of me because I had collapsed from the heat."

"Nah, I'd been thinkin' that you were a little strange for a while now... So, P-01s and I stripped you together."

"...That's something I didn't need to be reminded of."

Saying this, Masazumi was thinking.

It's only because of that that I can come here without worry.

But still, I'd like to avoid talking about my gender.

Therefore, Masazumi said this.

"It's true that to get my tuition fees and living expenses, other jobs would be better, but..."

"Ya parents're making a fuss?"

Having been asked this difficult question, Masazumi did not answer. Thinking about what to do, she inserted a piece of bread into her mouth, chewing thoroughly. Drinking the water in the glass, she exhaled.

An embarrassed laugh escaped from the shopkeeper.

"I'm sorry, that was rude of me... Are you going to do more work for the student council now? Ya don't have a break, do ya?"

Hearing this, Masazumi smiled a sad smile.

"You're worrying about me, huh," she said as a form of thanks.

"As the vice president of the student council I'll be escorting President Sakai to Mikawa, all the way until the checkpoint. Well, despite saying that... I was thinking that I'd go visit my mother's grave before I met up with the president."

"Haha, even if ya head to the Academy now, ya won't make it in time for class. But...could I ask why a young child would go visit a grave at a time like this?"

"My mother, who became a victim of a strange phenomenon, and I were born in Mikawa so... I thought that I should visit her before we disembark."

“...A victim of phenomena? One of the side-effects of the Apocalypse that everybody’s been talkin’ about recently?”

“Judge,” Masazumi nodded. She tried as hard as possible to recall the events of that time from an objective point of view.

“...Well, the truth is I don’t know whether or not it was a phenomenon. The magistrate in charge said that she’d been spirited away. Just, she was suddenly gone; and where she was supposed to have disappeared, a large symbol was written with blood...”

Masazumi drew a circle with her fingers, indicating a line piercing its center.

“A design like this was left behind. The investigation said that it seemed to be a type of spiriting away, linked to a group of mysterious disappearances called the ‘Princess Disappearances’. However, there are numerous accounts of robbers tricking people using this, not to mention regular disappearances or elopements. Well...there was a lot going on in Mikawa, and it’s becoming a place where phenomena occur readily. Because of this, even though I call it a grave I’m just going to see the things that my mother left behind. Ornaments, mementos...”

“That so,” a voice tinted with relief could be heard to say.

“Even though everyone tends to get depressed about the Apocalypse...you’re still a good girl.”

“That isn’t it at all. For school too, even though I’m paying my own tuition, I’m at the point where I think it’s fine to take a break from working... Well, once I reach the checkpoint today I’ll be able to hear about Tres España and K.P.A. Italia. They’re coming to inquire about the Logismoí Óplo, so I was thinking that I could learn something from it.”

“That’s really troublesome... Ah, also, thank P-01s for the meal this time.”

“Okay,” Masazumi answered. She looked towards the entrance.

Nobody was at the counter, and neither did it seem like someone was in front of the store.

Despite this, Masazumi still turned away and spoke.

“It’s already been a year, hasn’t it...if I hadn’t been saved by her, I would really have died.”

“Doesn’t it seem like yer gettin’ along with her well recently? Ya lent her some books, right?”

“Judge, mostly about general knowledge...the day before, I lent her my transcript of the history teacher’s lecture. As expected, it seems that she hasn’t read through it, though.”

“I see, ya really want to be a member of the provisional council. Ya have quite a lot of books.”

“Not that many,” Masazumi responded with a wry smile, though she thought differently.

If only I had the money to buy more.

“I’d read a whole lot more if I had the money... Well, I’m sorry for causing you trouble so often. I’m just freeloading right now, but I’ll return this debt in the future. I’ll become a great politician.”

“If ya become a member of the provisional council ya won’t need our bread anymore, right? If ya say that ya want to repay the debt, then...could you investigate P-01s’s origins for me like you did last time? Ya managed get a lot done.”

Hearing this, Masazumi folded her arms. It was true that a while ago she had investigated P-01s.

“Even with my authority as the vice president of the student council, I didn’t really learn anything in the end... Well, I think that being Musashi’s vice president doesn’t really lend much authority.”

“Why didn’t ya become a candidate for the student council president? The chancellor is recommended by the Testament Union, but the student council president is elected by a candidacy, y’know?”

Asked this, Masazumi thought. Immediately afterward, she uttered the words that made up her response.

“...Because, Aoi, the chancellor, declared his candidacy for the position of

student council president.”

•

It's hard just to criticize people like this, Masazumi thought. But despite this, it was meaningless to stay silent.

“Since he was born on Musashi everybody knows what he’s like; far more than what they know about me, a newcomer who’s only been here one year. The Testament Union’s also got an idea, having seen Aoi’s grades when he enrolled.”

“Well, he’s an idiot. In the past, he burst into the ceremony hall where the matriculation ceremony was being held, smiling like an idiot while clutching a bundle of lit ceremonial firecrackers.”

“Yeah, he chased all the new students around. The ceremony hall was in panic; but in the end the new students worked together, brought Toori down and launched the fireworks... A moving ending, even if rather forced. Speaking of which, President Sakai gave a closing speech. ‘Everyone, remember this day well,’ he said...like anyone would forget.”

“Well,” Masazumi said, folding her arms.

“...Because he, the chancellor, was elected to be the student council president, things ended without the Academy being split into two: a faction supporting the student council and another faction supporting the chancellor’s officers. Speaking from the Testament Union’s point of view, it’s easier to control the Academy if Aoi is the leader of both sides.”

“That so? Um, right now, it seems that he’s nicknamed ‘Impossible’; but can he really not do anything? Before, he was pretty...no, he was an idiot back then too, but what’s he like now?”

“Now?”

Masazumi tilted her head to the side. Because the shop served snacks and bread, opened early in the morning and had low prices, this shop was popular with students. Toori and his classmates could be seen here pretty often.

“I see them here quite often, but...you’re asking about what he’s like now?”

“Yeah, Toori had stopped coming for a while, stretchin’ from ten years ago till about a year ago. Before then, Toori, his sister Kimi, and a child who lived close by would eat breakfast together here.”

“...That was more than ten years ago? Then, it would’ve been nine years since Toori came last year...”

“That’s right, Toori only started to come here again since last year. When Masazumi-san came to Musashi, when P-01s started working here. Now, he comes every morning, just like he used to.”

“I wonder why?” the shopkeeper’s question floated out from the kitchen, but Masazumi could not answer her question.

“But even if he comes here, he doesn’t have a proper meal; he just buys bread to go, so it can’t be that he wants to get employed here when he graduates...and about that, well...”

“What is it?”

As she stretched her hand out to a piece of bread, she asked this question.

The shopkeeper’s voice could be heard.

“I’d been thinking that there was no way, but I’ve started to wonder.”

“...? What are you talking about, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“Hmmm, maybe it’d be easier to get it across to you if I say it like this.”

The sound of frying oil echoed from the kitchen. Audible inside this chain of sizzling noise, was a voice.

“Toori probably likes P-01s.”

•

“...Huh!?”

Masazumi’s hands, which had been tearing up bread, paused. Tilting her chair, she turned her gaze towards the kitchen; the shopkeeper’s back, visible across piles of kitchen tools, did not turn around.

“...Idiots that fall in love with automatons...that isn’t just a fairy tale, I guess.”

“Ah, no way, that’s...”

Automatons do not have emotions. Automatons instinctively serve people as living beings, but this is different from emotion. They do not understand the workings of emotion; and even if they were questioned concerning this they would not be able to answer.

...Therefore, they are “dolls”.

If what the female shopkeeper says is true, I can only think this of Toori’s behavior.

“It’s in vain, or rather...obsessive.”

Masazumi described what most would take as common sense. However, following the timing of a conversation, Masazumi heard the female shopkeeper’s voice.

“It’s fine, though it be in vain...”

“...Eh?”

She asked, but there was no answer. However, something came in its place.

“How’s Toori doing in school?”

Having been asked this, Masazumi realized that they were splintering from the conversation they had been having up to this point. So after thinking for a moment, Masazumi tore up her bread, retrieving the original flow of their conversation.

“By the Testament Union’s judgement...he has no capabilities at all, his academic ability is average, and it seems that they’ve judged that his athletic ability is below average in terms of stamina. Especially when it comes to his body...”

She framed this fact in vague words. However, a voice spilled out from the depths of the kitchen.

“Long before, he cut his left shoulder, and he’s bad at athletics because of it.”

“Y-yes.”

For the residents of Musashi, it is normal that I would hesitate?

“Haha, the fact that ya know... Masazumi-san, ya’ve seen Toori stripping right?”

“Saw or was shown... The first time I went to school, for some reason he, with ‘Underdog’ written in huge letters on the front of his body, was being chased around by a pack of dogs, running around inside the school building.”

“He can’t use swords very well because of that injury, huh.”

She was telling Masazumi what she already knew, seeking confirmation. Therefore, Masazumi also nodded.

“...Because of this, the Testament Union gave him the nickname ‘Impossible’.”

What she said was just the truth, exclusive of personal opinion.

“Even as a Musician of Shinto, he worships an Entertainment-type God said to focus upon fun and games... He appears to have passed the high-rank examinations, but it seems that he hasn’t yet applied for any blessings. I’ve been told that it’s because the blessing he can use isn’t useful.”

“What kind of blessing is it?”

“Judge, ‘Power Propagation’.”

Masazumi recalled the story she had heard from the Testament Union’s representative at the inheritance ceremony, where she became the vice president.

“—When Amaterasu was hiding in a cave behind a rock door, the laughter of the Goddesses dancing outside passed through the rock door and were conveyed to Amaterasu; and it became an opportunity to entice Amaterasu to come out. In short, the technique of the God of Entertainment is a technique that uses emotion as a medium, transmitting something to its receivers as a means to share it. Just like sharing laughs with everyone by dancing.”

Despite this, it was not useful.

“Included in this technique is a form of equivalent indemnity, which takes the form of ‘impurity’. When using laughter as a medium, there can be no sadness. If this is violated...the power which was propagated using laughter as a medium will conversely be taken away.”

“Taken away...which means?”

“The transmitted power will no longer be shared, and instead it will be thoroughly stolen away. Luck, emotion, even power...it depends on the contents of the contract; but as impurity, they’re mostly exorcised as impurities and won’t return for a long period of time. The reason that entertainers and artists whose careers fail experience psychological depression is because after failing in their works of art, the emotions of joy and laughter are lost from within themselves.

“What a terrifying spell...”

“Yes,” Masazumi said. She continued to speak.

“But for Aoi, it’s a meaningless technique. His abilities in academics and athletics are both average, so it’s meaningless for others to share them. And even if he had more power, the risk if it’s stolen away is far too high. Not being able to become sad...”

...Things like that happen quite often.

If something was stolen away almost like a follow-up to the sadness, it would be intolerable.

The moment she thought this, a soft laugh could be heard from inside.

“Haha, Masazumi-san, just as I was wondering whether ya hated Toori, ya were worrying about him, weren’t ya.”

Having been told something that she had not given the slightest thought, Masazumi flushed.

While drinking the water in her glass, she calmed her breathing.

“...If something happens to the student council president, the responsibility will fall on me.”

This is a fact. The student council and chancellor’s officers are the officials with the highest authority in all countries; but in Musashi the king who was sent by the Testament Union has the authority to make the final decision. Acting as the intermediary between the students and the Musashi King was the work of the vice president.

I myself think that it's a lot of trouble, but there's something else.

...What would it be like?

Masazumi hopes to be a politician. Her father is a member of the bureaucratic organization that aids the students, the provisional council; he ponders and amends the student council's decisions, brings suggestions from the citizens, and furthermore has the duty of managing the city from out of his personal budget.

When I've graduated from the Academy, I was thinking of starting on the road leading there.

But recently, a single question had come to life.

...As she was born in the Far East, wouldn't everything be useless?

•

In the Far East, where it was decided that the age limit for students was 18 years of age, no one can have anything to do with the government after graduation. Therefore the adults, or in other words the provisional council members, were nothing but bureaucrats. Even if they had wealth, they were nothing more than wonderful taxpayers.

Furthermore, in Musashi, the Musashi King sent by the Testament Union holds the authority to make the final decision. He can even veto the student council and chancellor's officers. Because all of Musashi is under his jurisdiction, it is impossible for Musashi to achieve autocracy. And because it was only able to fly above the tentative borderlines of all the other countries, it was unable to freely choose its flight path.

Even if I wanted to try and do something, it isn't my choice.

I've come to realize this very well in this one year. Looking at the circumstances after Aoi was chosen to be the chancellor, and the circumstances when he became the student council president, I was forced to fully realize this.

No one acknowledges our power.

...If so...

Wouldn't it be fine to make a cursory job of everything?

If we become dependent upon the other countries' occupation, there are certain privileges that we might receive. For example, Aoi receiving the positions of chancellor and student council president, becoming a celebrity within Musashi in the process.

And suddenly, Masazumi thought of her father.

Her father had left Mikawa ten years ago and moved to Musashi, where he had been a member of the provisional council for ten years.

Masazumi knew why. It had been a year since her father had called her and she had come to Musashi. She knew that many businessmen, real estate managers and ground transport managers went to her father. If you thought of this as a privilege, the meaning in becoming a member of the provisional council in Musashi, a politician, and her destination as a political hopeful...

“...”

Thinking about many things, Masazumi shook her head.

It was said that the Apocalypse would be coming this year; and as if indicating this, the frequency of phenomena was actually rising.

It was a present age where the immediate future could not actually be seen.

Therefore, Masazumi thought that at least during meals she would not think of the dark future.

At that moment:

“Your hands have stopped moving...was the bread not to your taste, Masazumi-san?”

Hearing the shopkeeper's voice, Masazumi reined in her thoughts. Startled, she drew a breath.

“Ah, no, I was just daydreaming.”

“Haha,” she laughed, but she herself felt that it was forced.

...There are just too many things to think about.

Her mother disappearing was the impetus for her to come to Musashi, but many things had happened in the year after.

She suddenly spoke.

“It’s all happened so fast. In a year, we’ve already gone once around the Far East. We’re arriving at my hometown, Mikawa. Even though Mikawa is the Far East’s representative, recently it’s become on good terms with P.A. Oda; so the Testament Union’s glaring at it. Also, because of New Nagoya Castle’s ley line reactor, the number of phenomena is overflowing... I wonder if my friends from before are doing well. People like the daughter of the other Honda family, Lord Tadakatsu’s daughter.”

“My, my, talking about friends from your hometown? Are ya homesick?”

“No,” even as she answered, she felt a little masochistic. Therefore, she spoke.

She spoke of something that she had been thinking of for a while. She spoke of one of the reasons that she often went out to do part-time jobs that started in the morning.

“...Our Academy, Ariadust, is really the Musashi residents’ Academy. I don’t really fit in. Or rather, the fact that I’m someone who competed for and failed to receive the inheritance of a name is also an issue; the fact that everyone...”

The fact that everyone was showing her care was evident

Her lips, which were on the brink of saying this, stopped.

“Do ya want to try and become friendly with everyone?”

A question came.

Uncomprehending, she pondered. After a while, Masazumi frowned.

“It’s not like they aren’t friendly...”

“Then, do ya ever feel that ya’d like to get along better with them? If ya do...”

She heard this.

“Investigate ‘Remorse Way’.”

“Remorse...Way...?”

Muttering this, Masazumi tilted her head to the side. If the name she had heard matched the image in her head, she knew the road the shopkeeper spoke

of. Indeed, that she knew it was a matter of course.

“Um, it’s the large starboard way in front of the Academy, isn’t it? It passes through a park, going from the right starboard till the bow...”

“Do you know why it’s named ‘Remorse Way’?”

“No,” Masazumi answered. She does not clearly know the reason.

What she does know is this:

...The stone slab at the entrance of that passage, the one that belongs to the girl named Horizon...

A grave-like stone slab was made ten years ago. It prays for a girl’s happiness in her next life. What meaning does it hold? If I investigate, will I learn the origins of the name that everyone normally uses, “Remorse Way”?

“What could it be?”

“It’s simple... There’s a fact that Masazumi-san does not know, but over half of Musashi’s residents do. If you investigate...yeah.”

With that, the noise of the shopkeeper in the kitchen turning around could be heard.

“Ten years ago, durin’ Musashi’s Great Renovation, a certain incident happened.”

“...An incident? Does it have anything to do with that stone slab? Horizon, the name of a girl, is written on it...”

“If ya’ve noticed that, then this’ll be quick. Just a step further. Have a look. If ya do this, more of Musashi’s various facets’ll become visible to you.”

Along with the sound of her voice and footsteps, a scent came. Turning around, the female shopkeeper, plate in her hand, was walking her way with a smile on her face.

“Each of Musashi’s residents remember why the name ‘Remorse Way’ was given to that road. So, ya should investigate. Yer worries’ll definitely lessen... Also, this.”

Atop the tray was a paper bag and a piece of bread. On top of the bread was

spinach fried in butter, ham, egg and carrot.

“Before, Toori and the girl who lived close by would put what we sold on a piece of bread. With the addition of soup, our mornin’ menu... Well, rather than mornin’, it was already noon. If yer goin’ now to visit a grave and Mikawa, I’ll wrap it together with a tightly sealed paper cup so ya can take it away.”

As her voice echoed outward, the bell that indicated the time rang out. It was the noontime bell.

Hearing this sound, Masazumi suddenly turned her gaze outside. The voice of the female shopkeeper, while putting the meal into a paper bag, continued.

“Is there somethin’ with the Academy yer interested about?”

“Judge, since today, Azuma-sama should have been returned from the Testament Union.”

“Ah, if that’s so the king’ll be with him. The Academy’ll be busy, won’t it? So yer interested, then?”

“Well,” Masazumi said and stood up. While listening to the sound of the female shopkeeper arranging the paper bag on top of the table, she spoke.

“Once in a while, I take a guess about why that place would be busy.”

My plans today: visiting a grave and going to Mikawa.

...But if I investigate Remorse Way afterward, will I learn something?

Chapter 04: The Foreigner King

CHAPTER 4

"The Foreigner King"



Thinking about what might be wrong.
Yet having no idea what to do.

Point Allocation (Decisiveness)

Thinking about what might be wrong

Yet having no idea what to do

Point Allocation (Decisiveness)

•

Two figures stood in front of the entrance to a classroom.

A middle-aged man and a boy stood in the wooden corridor before a door. A door with a shrine and the Third Year Plum Class sign hanging above it.

The man was wearing white tights, a shirt with bulging shoulders embroidered with gold, and had a crown on his head. Embroidered onto the armband on his right arm was the emblem of the Testament Union and the words: "Vice Principal and King of Musashi".

The boy next to him was dragging a travel bag in his left hand. He was clad in a male school uniform.

The boy glanced up at the man's face before turning his gaze to the shrine above the door that stood in front of him.

"It seems like though you said they'd open it immediately, they're taking their time, Vice Principal Yoshinao."

"Yes, but they are mannerless commoners, Lord Prince."

Yoshinao looked at him, the boy with the nametag "Azuma". He spoke.

"This is preposterous. It is simply unbelievable that the class that you, the prince, will enter is the same class that you had attended last year. The school president sure is quite imprudent."

"Well, it's the rules, and I'm not the prince anymore..."

"No, no," Yoshinao said.

"Though your power was sealed and your political status removed under the Testament Union's orders, you are without a doubt the emperor's son. As the celebrity sent from Hexagone Française of the Testament Union to be the king of Musashi, We^[6] have been sincerely looking forward to your return."

"Ah," Azuma nodded. Beside him Yoshinao, the duly-appointed king of

Musashi, spoke.

“But really, the people of Musashi are so aloof. We cannot believe that despite your return there was no one other than Us to welcome you.”

“Ah, no, the Testament said that my return should not cause a commotion. I boarded last night on a special flight, and I’d been going through a medical examination till now... A good thing too, because I like it better when it’s quiet...”

“My prince, how kind of you. To think that you would cover for your people...”

Yoshinao folded his arms and heaved a satisfied sigh.

Originally he was not one of the people of Musashi. He was from the peace-keeping organization based on Central Europe, the Union of the Testament. He had once been the lord of a small dominion on Hexagone Française’s borders; but because his abilities were recognized there, he had been sent away. This had happened in a manner similar to having been poached by another organization.

...Despite this, he came here shouldering a heavy responsibility. Currently...

Currently, in the year 1648, the world could not have any multinational organizations. This was because their establishment had not been written in the Testament’s description of history.

However, when the Harmonic Divine States had collapsed all of the countries needed to maintain some form of connection.

Created for this purpose was the Union of the Testament, which made use of the church ecumenical councils that had been held in Europe since times long past.

Each time a church or ecumenical council opened as described in the Testament’s description, the representatives of the pro-Testament Testamental religions in each country would gather for the purpose of exchanging opinions and coordinating with each other. They kept in contact during the times in-between, and the branches in each country fulfilled their duties. It was a conditional, pseudo-multinational organization.

The Education Committee, which sent teaching staff to different countries, belonged to the Testament Union.

...As a result, they were commonly thought of as the Teachers' Union.

The teachers on Musashi were sent from the Far East branch, but Yoshinao was sent from the central headquarters of the Testament Union as Musashi's supervisor. In exchange for the Far East retaining military freedom when the Harmonic Unification War ended 160 years ago, a king for Musashi was sent by the Testament Union to supervise Musashi's governance and flight.

Because the king of Musashi made the final judgements regarding the decisions of the students' chancellor's officers and the student council, and because he also decided Musashi's flight path, Musashi would be unable to get the general framework of its government and flight moving without his approval.

As such, Yoshinao thought of himself as being the "compass needle for keeping peace and order".

"But still, the people in this class are all demons...!"

"Eh? What's with you all of a sudden, Vice Principal?"

"Ah, nothing," Yoshinao swallowed the words that he had unthinkingly spoken.

...When it comes to these people, We, the king sent by the Testament Union...

Since Yoshinao came to the Musashi, he had no recollection of the students ever treating him with respect. Especially that particular chancellor who always made fun of him by calling him "We".

...Only We can call We, We!

We think this is all the Far East's Board of Education's fault.

As the Testament Union could not hold a regular conference of all the branches, one of their weaknesses was that it was easy for the branches in each country to become independent. The Far East's branch was in Izumo. However, the academic division of the Far East's biggest industry, IZUMO Industries, was in control and Musashi's teaching staff was sent from Izumo.

...An unacceptable state of affairs is being overlooked...!

This was true even now. Even though Azuma was returning, he could not even enter the classroom. It had been more than five minutes since the teacher Oriotorai's voice had called through the door, saying: "Please wait a moment~"

And now the faint voices coming from within were saying this:

"M-Miss, please don't use so much strength. Ah...the hole's widening, I can't hide it..."

"Ah, Heidi, no, you can't touch it when it's going in!"

"But Miss, the support's...ah, eww, something sticky's leaking from the tissue..."

"Just what kind of iniquitous sacrilege were you all transgressing in this consecrated classro...!!!"

Beyond the door, which was slammed open by the king...

In the space opened before him, a naked boy was standing with his arms raised and a smile on his face.

•

"!!!"

Yoshinao shut the door in reflex.

Beside him Azuma made an "Eh? Eh?" face, wondering what was wrong with Yoshinao.

"Wh-what's the matter, Mr. Vice Principal!? Is something wrong!?"

Yoshinao, with his back leaned against the door, shook his head.

"I-it's nothing, Azuma-kun! Yeah, it's nothing!"

And then they heard blows as if a palm was striking the door from inside the classroom.

"Heeey We! That was you right!? Why are you staying there? Why don't you come inside if you want to come in! No one here really hates you. In fact, nobody actually cares."

“Hey, Toori! Will you quit strip-dancing over there and give us a hand here?”

“Ah, Sensei. We is just right outside and won’t come in. It seems he’s getting embarrassed. But I guess that couldn’t be helped. He doesn’t know what to do in this kind of situation. That We, he loves cosplaying as the king from a deck of playing cards; because of that he has trouble making friends. Hey, everyone! Next time you see We reading a manga in the corner giggling silently by himself, don’t be afraid to talk to him, alright?”

...That brat... We swear We’ll lynch him someday!

Yoshinao faced his companion. Azuma was looking up to his face, flabbergasted. Realizing the situation, Yoshinao talked flusteredly.

“R-rest assured. We do have someone We can call a friend.”

From inside the classroom, Toori’s voice said.

“Oh, that’s right. Guess I was worrying for nothing. We has at least one friend, right, Neshinbara?”

...Humm.

That’s right. As expected of this Academy’s chancellor, you’re quick on the uptake.

In response to Toori’s words, Neshinbara replied:

“You mean that? Last wagon sale we bought up all the stocks of that IZUMO-brand mind-training game titled ‘Essential Communication Skills for Lonely People - Make 100 Friends in 1 Week!’ and then sent all the packages in a single box to the king’s house, right? And then we put a message with it, which I wrote for all us: ‘Since your highness is distressedly friendless, please think of this as your friend. —From all of Musashi’s students.’ I see. That’s the ‘friend’ the king was talking about.”

“...So it was all your fault, that these last few days Our wife has been making a worried face every time she looks at Us!!”

Yoshinao, enraged, swung the door open once again.

The naked body was there no more, but instead there was a female teacher.

The beaming female teacher, Oriotorai, said:

“Ah, King-sama. I’m really sorry but we’re not finished cleaning up yet.”

“Eh? No, you see.”

Yoshinao directed his gaze beyond Oriotorai’s back, to the wall near the window.

“We think We saw a human-shaped hole over there and someone was gluing paper over it as if like...”

The door suddenly shut. From inside the classroom, came immediately the voice.

“Everyone! We seriously need to hurry up! The king is starting to grow suspicious of us. That guy, he is surprisingly sharp about small details.”

“Sensei! Sensei! That hole is not small at all! But whatever. Listen everyone!”

That was Toori’s voice.

“It’s too bad Seijun cannot make it today. But anyway, don’t forget we will have a meeting for my confession plan right after class and a ghost-busting party later tonight. Prepare yourselves everyone! Cause tonight will be a blast!”

“Oi, wait a minute! We’re still in the middle of class. You sure got guts ignoring me while I’m teaching here, huh? Do you wanna get slapped that bad?”

“Huh!? What, Sensei!? Just because you got nice tits, you think you can scare me with tha-ackk!?” [7]

The whole classroom shook as Toori said that last word.

“Ackk?” Azuma asked himself, pondering its significance.

And then from inside the classroom, Azuma heard a calm voice,

“Sensei. Please be careful not to break the classroom. By the way, I think I saw Azuma right outside the door.”

“Right! I completely forgot about him! I was too busy saving my hide.”

Two seconds after Oriotorai said that, the door opened for the third time.

Oriotorai, beaming once again, looked at Azuma.

“Oh my~ Azuma. It has been a long time. How do you find Musashi now? You’ll be living in the dorm from now on, right? I’ll make sure to let you know where your room is once it is decided.”

“Oriotorai-kun. Watch your manners. You mustn’t refer to Azuma-kun without honorifics. You should call him Azuma-sama or...”

“Ah, right. Please pardon my lack of manners, King-sama. I’ll make sure it won’t happen next time. ...So Azuma, you want to come inside? Right?”

Not giving Azuma the opportunity to give an answer, Oriotorai grabbed Azuma’s head with her right hand and offhandedly pulled him inside the room.

Yoshinao, having been left alone...

“Hold it right there!”

Yoshinao directed his gaze beyond Oriotorai’s back once more, towards the direction where the hole in the wall was. What he saw there were two figures standing in front of the wall. One was a half-naked giant wearing an iron mask, and the other one was a plump guy. If he recalled their names correctly, the giant was called Persona-kun while the blimp was called Ginji Ohiroshiki. Thanks to their bulky muscles and the rotundity of their body respectively, the wall was completely sheltered from Yoshinao’s vision.

“Oriotorai-kun. Could it be those two people are standing there to camouflage the hole in...”

“Ehh!? Wh-what are you talking about King-sama? There’s no human-shaped hole in the wall! I’m not lying, really! Actually I made those two stand there because...uhh... That’s right! We’re doing Biology class right now! And uhh... I’m showing the whole class what will happen to your body if you only eat meat or pizza everyday.”

Her face straightened.

“In other words, we’re still in the middle of class! Can you wait until later?”

The door was violently slammed shut right after Oriotorai said her last word. Yoshinao, finally left alone, felt an urge to kick the door, but managed to

restrain himself. His common courtesy had successfully dissuaded him from committing a misbehavior. It was not an act a king should do.

“Seriously...”

Yoshinao folded his arms, giving the door a glare. From within came the loud cheers and claps of students warmly welcoming Azuma. And with a nod he wheeled around, turning his back to the door.

Yoshinao could hear Azuma introducing himself inside the classroom.

The sky beyond the hall windows was stark white as Musashi maintained its stealth flight.

•

Under the white sky, rows of stones were lined up in a wide area.

This place was a cemetery located within the memorial park near Okutama’s bow. It was a place with a panoramic scenery. Only its main road had pavement.

Within that lush greenery stood one girl, with a pail in one hand.

The name of the girl in school uniform and looking up at the sky was Masazumi.

“This is my first time coming to this place at this hour,” Masazumi said without taking her eyes away from the sky. She then scanned her surroundings.

Below the drab sky, in the elevated area of Okutama’s stern at the end of the stone steps was where Ariadust Academy Institute was situated.

“They are probably taking the fourth period by now.”

Masazumi wondered how everyone was doing. She had not been with them that long, but she had a basic idea of everyone’s character.

Masazumi got along with them very well, to the point that last year everyone in class supported her when she ran for vice president of the student council. She was on good terms with everyone, and everyone was on good terms with her; to the extent that Masazumi wondered what they were up to right now.

However it seemed that everyone in the class, or rather most of the students

in the Academy were supporting Aoi Toori for some reason.

Masazumi had realized this ever since last year's election. She was aware of how popular Toori was; and even after seeing everyone's reaction from all the ruckus he caused, that didn't change her conclusion.

But his popularity didn't just come into being through [name recognition](#), but rather his virtue and character. Then in that case...

"...It's a popularity similar to that of an idol."

Masazumi wished that this was not the case. A country, especially one like Far East with many interventions from all the other nations, selecting a leader based not on their political skill but popularity was...

...A sign of the people giving in to provisional rule.

Masazumi, as one who aspired to become a politician, did not want to give up. In the future she hoped to work as a member of the provisional council for the Musashi just like her father.

...And bring a change to the Far East, no matter how trivial.

160 years since the Harmonic Unification War, the reason why the Far East hadn't been completely taken over was because nothing like that was written in the Testament. However, there were many ways to circumvent that. Anyone who had been in politics for years could easily think of one.

If the Musashi or its possessor Mikawa made an irrevocable mistake, Masazumi was certain that the Testament Union would not overlook exploiting it.

Currently, Mikawa acted as a bridge between the Testament Union and P.A. Oda; but...

If something big happens, the Testament Union will use the excuse of "History Reproduction Protection" to completely take over the Far East.

Favorable conditions upon resolution of land issues regarding harmonic territories, monetary assets, and the guarantee of production through labor: These were some of the obvious benefits that all the other nations would gain when Far East had been completely taken over. From what she could make out

according to the accounts she had obtained from the provisional council officials, all of their stories were nothing but headache inducers.

...The most problematic issue right now is the resolution of land disputes arising from the harmonic territories that occupy half the country.

Harmonic territories were caused by partially overwritten ley lines when the Harmonic Divine States collapsed to the Divine States. In consequence the Far East land had partially assimilated the other nations' environmental conditions from the Harmonic Divine States. Because the climates inside the harmonic territories were the same as those in the very same spot in the Harmonic Divine States (for example, in the Chuugoku region we had Europe; in Mikawa we had India; in the Kantou region, Qing; in the Hokuto region, Russia), it could be said that not only the people but even the environmental conditions from the other world had migrated here.

Even though said environmental change was locally limited on the ground, its effect could reach up to the sky. For an aerial city like the Musashi which occupied the sky, those zones looked like pillars.

...However, since harmonic territories were sparsely scattered within the land, the Far East and the other nations couldn't successfully establish a distribution of territory to occupy after the Unification War.

Why? Because the land is not even stable in the first place to be fairly distributed. This fact we are fully aware of, as it was being taught in class.

However, if the Far East is completely taken over the Testament Union will obtain the power to execute the land distribution by themselves.

No... More precisely, when the Far East has been completely taken over the Testament Union can simply shove the Far East's people towards worse lands while they occupy the lands with better conditions.

The statements that officials made regarding the Far East being "taken over" were always negative.

...Taking over doesn't only mean amalgamation or unification, or even occupation. It can mean many other things. If the Far East is taken over, its government and authority will be claimed by the Testament Union. They could

even re-implement the practice of slave labor that was in place before the Middle Ages.

Currently Tsirhcs and Mlasis are forbidden to establish financial enterprises according to their religious precepts; thus, those kinds of businesses are quietly run by the Far East in their stead. However, once taken over, they can simply milk the profit out of Far East's banks while they maintain the said compromise.

Aside from gaining a foothold against P.A. Oda, the other countries were interested in Musashi's trade capacity as well as the technological capacities of Mikawa and IZUMO (especially the former, which built the Musashi).

Of course, if the people under this rule were to perish then the manpower would be lost and productivity would be compromised; but until it came to that, the loss-gain calculations from administrative expenses and labor revenues would be all that the Testament Union would care about. If the Testament Union could find a way to maintain the population and just let a very few people succeed historical figures as part of the history recreation, then this would be what the officials in the provisional council regard as the worst case scenario.

...In other words, "taking over" ultimately means the ruler would have the power to order everything as they wished; including the rights of life and death of its subjects.

The provisional council, including Masazumi's father, was probably conscious that all of these predictions were based from extreme assumptions. But a fragment of doubt still remained in her mind that maybe they were only trying to stir uneasiness in people.

But still, it doesn't change the fact that the Far East has to do something to keep things from exacerbating into the worst case situation. "Whether trusting the other party's conscience is sound policy or not, there is no need to tempt the other party by dangling bait before their face," as her father had said.

That's why right now, Musashi relinquishes all its armaments and focuses only on trades while keeping their heads low all the time. Mikawa's Logismoι Όπλο, for example, were not handed to the P.A. Oda but instead to all the other nations of the Testament Union as proof of taking a non-hostile stance.

But things will change eventually. That's for sure.

According to the history in the Testament, the Oda clan will slowly dissipate after the loss of its leader Nobunaga. The responsibility of unifying the Far East will shift to the Toyotomi clan instead; and it will be successfully finalized by the Matsudaira clan later on.

No one knows when the unification of the Far East will happen since the history recreation has been disrupted ever since the Unification War; and there is the possible threat of the impending Apocalypse to boot. To give an example, this year is 1648; yet P.A. Oda announced the succession of Oda Nobunaga 8 years ago, even though this historical figure should have already been dead since 1582.

“Oda Nobunaga was assassinated according to history, so P.A. Oda had been keeping Nobunaga’s physical existence under wraps from the Testament Union in order to prevent the Testament Union from killing him through history recreation. P.A. Oda were playing skirmishes with the Testament Union here and there as they hide their leader. On the contrary, it gives them a threatening impression instead.”

P.A. Oda has been expediting its history recreation after the succession of Nobunaga, though they still haven’t caught up to its lag.

If the Apocalypse does not happen, Nobunaga will eventually come out to the world commencing his ambition of conquering the whole Far East; and then be assassinated. The Matsudaira clan will follow through on the remaining history and the Far East will finally feel the true meaning of being unified.

“When that time comes, the Far East will confront all the other nations as a unified country; but...”

Are the Far East’s people already giving up? Are they abandoning everything they have, being complacent in comfort provided by Provisional Rule?

...Abandon.

The word which Masazumi hated the most, having given up everything after all.

Masazumi shifted her gaze below. Her hands were carrying a pail. It was the

Hondas' property. So was the wooden ladle, and the sheaf of flowers too.

Masazumi focused her attention on the flowers and said:

"...I don't want to experience that same feeling again, nor do I want to let anyone else feel it."

•

I wonder, Masazumi thought as she raised her head and directed her gaze to the Academy beyond.

"Aoi Toori."

I, myself haven't decided yet what to do in the first place but...

"What about you, Aoi Toori...? I wonder what you will do?"

I hope you...

"You were also like me, one who doesn't want to give up..."

What if he was like me then?

...So what of it?

Masazumi contemplated on that question for a while; but in the end she just shook her head.

"?"

Because Masazumi had her gaze set below, a person was standing in front of her without her realizing it. That person turned out to be a girl she was familiar with.

P-01s.

"Judging from this situation, P-01s should say 'I have been waiting for your arrival.' "

A voice came, its owner approaching her way. A hand was raised, and it lifted up Masazumi's pail.

Ah, Masazumi lifted up her head.

"What are you doing here?"

“Judge,” the automaton impassively replied, then showed the book she was carrying to Masazumi.

“As Masazumi-sama had suggested, P-01s concluded to peruse this book in a quiet place. Owing to this book, P-01s has completely grasped the current societal system as well as the sundry patterns of the national leaders. Each and every one of them resorted straight off to rash decisions. Some were arrested, and some were disgraced. Its intricacy is very engrossing.”

I wonder from what perspective you were reading that in order to arrive at that conclusion? Masazumi thought, but dropped the idea of voicing it out.

P-01s raised her free hand.

“...I have one question. Where are you headed to, Masazumi-sama?”

Chapter 05: Those Reunited Under the Fair Sky

CHAPTER 5

"Those Reunited Under the Fair Sky"



At that time.
To that person.
What should I have said?
Point Allocation (Emotion)

At that time

To that person

What should I have said?

Point Allocation (Emotion)

•

“...But I would never have thought that I would meet you in this kind of place.”

That voice, with a tendency to look downwards, was brought to life in the graveyard.

The owner of the voice, Masazumi, was crouching in front of the graveyard next to the main road adjoined with the greenery.

She was weeding.

“Are you cleaning? They say that automatons really do like to clean no matter where they are.”

“Judge, that principle does exist. The cleaning of this place is a daily routine.”

P-01s, plucking the weeds of the graveyard in the same manner as I, answered.

When the taken weeds had reached a certain amount, P-01s took the trash that consisted in clumps of dirt and fallen leaves along with the piled up weeds and brought them to the gutter adjacent to the path.

As if responding, the lid of the gutter was lifted; and from below, pale black algae stuck their faces out.

“Useless? Natural materials?”

Facing them, P-01s lifted her index finger before her nose and gave the trash to the algae. With that, the algae bore it atop their heads and once again descended into the gutter.

Masazumi was speechless in response to the feeding actions which had been happening behind her back for some time.

She had noticed it a while before, but somehow, below the gutters, the black algae creatures of the sewage pipes seemed to have gotten used to P-01s.

Furthermore, the shared opinion between P-01s and the black algae creatures seemed to be that it would be for the better if it were not known that the black algae creatures were going outside.

...It was because that would mean that the black algae creatures were slacking off from their work...

“Not known? OK? Alright?”

“Judge, I can discern that it is alright. Our cover is perfect.”

...Aside from the absolute lack of basis in that assumption, now it's perfectly known by me...!!

While I was thinking and pulling the weeds, a voice suddenly came from behind me.

“Masazumi-sama does the maintenance of this gravestone quite often.”

“Ahh, that's because it's my mother's. There aren't even any remains, so inside are only her mementos... Even if I put it like that, it would be hard to understand for an automaton, right? ...You're born from souls, so you don't have anything like a mother.”

“Judge. I will frankly state my thinking... Masazumi-sama sure loves her mother.”

I was told a sudden thing.

...Love, huh?

Because it was a rather direct statement, Masazumi lost the timing of her response.

“No,” or, “that's right”? Without giving back an appropriate response, an affirmation or negation, without being certain which feeling should be the correct one, Masazumi just looked down at the flowers in the bucket beside her.

White flowers. As she let that color to flow to her own heart, P-01s voice was

heard from behind.

It was...

“...Let me pass...”

Suddenly, a song.

...*Eh?*

What was audible was a song that even Masazumi knew. A well-known children’s song.

The song named “Song of Passage”. From the throat of an automaton, it was heard.

—Let me pass, let me pass.

If I follow this narrow path, where will it take me?

This narrow path leads to the gods in heaven

Your opinion is not needed. You cannot pass through here

I have come to celebrate this child’s tenth birthday

By dedicating these two talismans

Going may be easy, but returning is frightening

Can I...

“...pass despite my fear?”

From Masazumi’s ears to her chest, there was something akin to trembling. A trembling of excitement and pleasure came, a feeling which seemed as if the depths of her skin were being wrung.

There was something which she had heard from the shopkeeper before. That P-01s’s soul was in her throat.

Then, that voice of song was the trembling of P-01s’s soul. However...

...*This song is...*

I know it. No, anybody living in the Far East would know it.

According to the Testament descriptions, the original version of the Song of Passage began to be sung during the 17th century; but a hundred years before it was supposed to be introduced by the Testament, there was an experiment where this song got its original versions in many places.

That experiment was the Song of Passage.

At the time when the provisional rule of each country was established, this became a song which brought the people of the Far East together.

About thirty years ago, all the versions of the song were collected; and now it was being used as a song to put children to sleep. As the children sang it, it became used for playing the game matched to the song: “I Wonder if it’s a Passage”.

However, Masazumi had no memories of singing this together with everyone.

She had only heard it from afar, when other children played while singing it.

However, when hearing it from nearby it had happened that she really had sang it.

There was something from her youth. At the time where her awareness of her surroundings was not yet certain...

...It was my mother, as a lullaby...

When she thought that...

“Is there something wrong, Masazumi-sama?”

Being asked, she was unable to respond immediately.

Masazumi sucked in a breath, adjusting the uncertain trembling within her body.

“...Haah.”

The breath she exhaled softly trembled just once. Thinking about how to respond, Masazumi thought...

I remembered a little of something from the past.

With that, Masazumi put power into her knees.

What comes after this is something that does not need to be said, but... she told her heart as a preface...

...As the people who can hear it and find it meaningful are not here.

Therefore, I will dare to say it.

“I’ve spoken about this before, haven’t I? Originally, I lived in Mikawa below us. My family name is Honda, one of the vassals there. For the Matsudaira, two Hondas are needed.”

She took in a breath remembering the face of the other Honda, the person whom she had not exchanged words with since middle school.

“The first Honda is one of the Four Heavenly Kings, the martial Honda family represented by Honda Tadakatsu. The other was the political Honda family represented by Honda Masanobu. I was not a warrior, so my father...”

“Your father inherited the name of Masanobu-sama?”

“He failed.”

Masazumi rested her hands and spoke.

“Another person, not from the Honda family, got to change his name; thus inheriting the name of Honda Masanobu. At that time, my father was just being too honest. Therefore, I...”

What was I like?

Told by my father, did I myself wish for what I had started then? I don’t even remember the reason, but...

“He thought that a child of Masanobu should try to inherit the name of Masanobu’s son. And, for that cause, he thought that I would do anything; and so I did.”

However...

•

“I failed.”

Masazumi's mouth moved.

The words which had just spilled from her lips had not been uttered till now.

This won't do, her heart thought. That was because...

...The people who can hear it and find it meaningful are not here.

A resting place where my mother isn't really present. An automaton. Black algae creatures... Were they even still in the gutter? If she were a young girl, inside her own room, she would consult with her own precious doll about the unsettling things which had happened today; *but is this situation the same?*

A stupid complaint, isn't it? Masazumi thought; and she realized that she had never even shown this outwardly.

Whatever the situation, on the Musashi no matter where or when it was always noisy. In the schools, in the roads, there were always people.

Therefore if one has no friends that one can talk about various things with, one can't do anything but search for a place where one can be alone. There is nothing to do but to find a place where one can spit out stupid complaints to oneself and hide. And now, here, finally...

"...Ten years ago, the Matsudaira family carried out the 'clearing out' of their vassals. So, many vassals were demoted and relieved of their duties... After that, all of Matsudaira's vassals and commercial groups were taken up by the Sagami's mass-produced automatons."

Facing P-01s, an automaton herself, Masazumi thought that she would not want this not to turn into a series of distasteful complaints. Therefore, she let that be the end about the incident with the automatons.

"You know, I..."

Masazumi touched her chest with her hands. The uniform she was wearing was a male one. Masazumi, pressing her hand hard into that chest, opened her mouth whilst feeling a strange dryness in her throat...

"When I was fighting for the right to inherit the name, I had an operation in order to not be at a disadvantage... An operation where a woman like me would be altered into a man. First, they removed my breasts...and when they were still

deciding whether to also change the sex organs into masculine ones, the sudden 'clearing out' made all of it meaningless."

My father fled to Musashi; and I whose body had become weak due to the surgery was left on the surface with my mother.

My losing my breasts was something I wished for myself. However, after the sudden "clearing out" my goal was completely lost. With all that I did being not even affirmed or negated, my goal merely vanished with a meaningless sense of powerlessness being all that was left. It was as if, after having decided my way forward and working hard in my studies for the test, the road I had to follow just disappeared.

I would have been able to accept it if I just failed the name inheritance.

But it was as if "all of what you did was utterly meaningless" was said to me.

The me from before, the me left in my memory was always apologizing. Without being able to start things by myself, without being able to answer my father's expectations, I caused trouble for my mother. The same mother that, in the end, was spirited away in the events known as the "Princess Disappearances"...

"Why...was it all just letting go..."

At that moment she muttered.

Suddenly, something spilled out from the corners of her eyes.

Thinking damn, Masazumi wiped her cheeks with the sleeve of her uniform.

"Crying is unsightly."

"Is that so?"

At P-01s's voice, audible from behind, Masazumi nodded. If it was weakness or relief, she didn't know.

"Aah...if it were possible, I'd want to hide somewhere. But I can't do that here either, right?"

"Judge, thank you for your understanding. And now, one question about Masazumi-san has been resolved."

“And that is?”

“Judge,” P-01s’s voice could be heard.

“If I were to speak frankly, that Masazumi-sama wearing male uniforms was not hobby.”

Masazumi was returned to reality in an instant.

...Wait a second, wasn't I hiding the fact that I am a woman?

Should I get mad? No, rather, is it resentment? What is it, this strange feeling which is welling up in the pit of my stomach? It's obviously not affectionate. If I were to speak with the power of debate that I practiced in my specialized essay classes, I am supposed to state my conclusion first; so if I were to say it in one sentence, it would be “like hell it's that.” Furthermore, what on earth is with that “that” at the end, an exclamation as if just stuck there? Even further, the black algae creatures...

“Mound? Mound?”

Who was it that taught them those kinds of words; or is it a racial memory?

I've really forgotten. Although this was a place where I could be alone even if there was a doll that would hear my idle complaints, this doll just did an amazing tsukkomi. However...

“Masazumi?”

The black algae creatures asked P-01s her name in confirmation, and Masazumi felt surprise.

Responding, P-01s also hid the black algae creatures from Masazumi’s sight while starting to act as if she was plucking weeds.

“Judge, she is Masazumi-sama. Do you remember her? Do you remember how when Masazumi-sama was starving and collapsed she nearly unknowingly crushed you?”

Masazumi then thought that from this time onwards she had to check the surroundings when she fell.

“Masazumi... Seijun?”

“Judge, that is correct, she is a politician. She is a conservationist at work and exploits taxes to help the people.”

It would have been better to deny it; but that too again seemed to be a joke, so Masazumi was silent. With that, the black algae creatures asked some things.

“Friend?”

“—Judge, that is what is said about the both of us acknowledging each others’ existence.”

“Able to become... Friend?”

“That is,” P-01s stopped speaking, and there was an indication that she was looking her way. So, Masazumi turned her back on them, and while acting as if looking at the sky...

“Recently, I’ve wanted some friends.”

“Can I be one?”

“Judge. ...Speaking frankly, Masazumi does not have many friends; so this is my chance. In other words, it’s pretty easy. Do not worry, Masazumi-sama is a politician so she loves the management of things like sewage.”

...What’s with that wrong way of putting things!!

When she thought that, something suddenly occurred above her head.

“—?”

The sky split, and the color blue suddenly spread outward before her eyes as if bursting open.

“Ah.”

It wrapped around their entire surroundings in an instant. The blue sky was proof of the disengagement of stealth flight. Indicated by that was...

“...Have we arrived at Mikawa?”

Below, there was a mountain range. The other side remained unseen, but eventually, there would be a continental port for Musashi’s use visible in the colossal valley and the adjoining open-air type common use flat continental port should appear soon. And on the other side of those, was the village of

Mikawa where she herself had once lived.

...*“I’ve returned.”* That was something she could not say.

She herself was already a resident of the Musashi; Mikawa too had continued to change from the time she had been there. Nowadays, it was rumored that in the large workshop which had four ley line reactors they were making a gift to P.A. Oda; so just in one year, Mikawa had really changed. Because of a warp in the ley lines caused by the ley line reactors phenomena happened frequently, accompanying the “clearing out” national policy.

“How many people are left in Mikawa? ...The other Hondas’ second generation should still be there.”

She herself had come to the Musashi; but most people had not left Mikawa, for many reasons, and were living in the outskirts while thinking that the incompleteness of business functions in the city center (because of the “clearing out” and danger of the phenomena) was rather inconvenient.

“I wonder how it all turned out... Well, I’m just sending President Sakai today, so I’ll just be looking at it from afar.”

The sound of the wind could be heard and the trembling echoes of the wind hit the wind-protection spell which the Musashi had.

However, that wasn’t all of it.

Above and directly to the front, as if exiting the area above Musashi’s center leading ship, Musashino, a single ship had come.

It was an aerial passenger-ship with length around 120 meters. From above Musashino, it was trying to circle to the area above them, on Okutama. Compared to all of the Musashi’s ships, its size did not even match one tenth of theirs; but looking at it, the ship had a size large enough to project a shadow across one of the horizontal passages.

Judging from its trajectory and speed, the ship was currently trying to pass above them. If there wasn’t some sort of mistake...

...*It was a flight to see all of the Musashi.*

While thinking about it, Masazumi looked at the side of the passenger ship.

On the other side of the rustling leaves of the trees, where the side of the passenger ship was with waves streaming from its water line, there was a family emblem.

In the midst of the sun's reflection, it could be seen that it was the family emblem of the three-petaled hollyhock.

The only family able to use that emblem was the Matsudaira family. So that meant...

"That's the ship of the lord of the Matsudaira, Lord Motonobu!?"

Ten years ago, right before the Musashi had been renovated, Lord Motonobu had descended to the Musashi. After that visit he had never returned. This was because ten years ago, when the provisional alliance with P.A. Oda had become a formal alliance, the Testament Union forbade him to board the Musashi (since it was able to become a mobile fortress) to prove Mikawa's neutrality.

...Why he is doing this? Has Lord Motonobu come to welcome the Musashi?

She knew very well Lord Motonobu's tendency for a spectacle, and she also recognized his voice and face pretty well.

If it were to be said why...

"...Greetings! It's been a while, residents of the Musashi. Do you remember your teacher's face?"

From every external speaker on the Musashi, this man's voice resounded.

That was not all. At every shrine, on top of the hall which housed the shrine itself, enormous torii-shaped signframes appeared. Reflected in the middle of the frame there was a single man whose back was facing the bridge of a ship.

His hair was covered with a black scholar's cap with his glasses hung. To the announcing device, which was a microphone held by his right hand with his pinky finger outstretched, he said: "Thank you for staying with us; I am Mikawa's lord, Matsudaira Motonobu. But it'd be great if you called me your teacher."

•

...It was because of this.

Sagging her shoulders, Masazumi thought. *Motonobu really loves making announcements with the divine transmission.*

Originally, because people were leaving Mikawa's center due to the phenomena and the clearing out of people, it seemed that it was something he started so his voice could reach the outskirts. But as the time passed, it turned into an exhibition that was performed at the slightest chance.

His specialty was an one-sided rambling, so he called himself the "teacher". And even now, he was still going along with that.

"Because of the Testament Union's instructions, the Musashi's residents cannot descend to Mikawa. But, do not worry. We'll be bringing lots of things from Mikawa, and the people who've come to sightsee will talk about it, right? So everyone, I want you to use your shrine's ley line divine transmission or connections to have exchanges with Mikawa. And if it's possible, your teacher also wants to know what kind of lives you are all living and what you want to do from now on. I'd like it if you'd let me hear that from all of you, that's all. Then, let's start. There's lots of time, so let's use it all effectively."

He continued.

"Tonight, I've prepared something special. At night it would be nice if all of you could look in Mikawa's direction, because I've prepared some fireworks. With this...today's first lesson is over!!"

Along with his words, the divine transmission disappeared and the display frames above the shrines also closed and vanished.

Now Motonobu's ship was passing over their heads.

Masazumi chased the passing figure of the ship with her gaze, and she turned around...

"Really, not only Mikawa, but even the Lord has come..."

"...hasn't he?" those were the words that Masazumi was not able to say.

Her gaze was fixed upon P-01s, behind her.

P-01s's back was facing her way, and she was waving at the ship traversing the sky.

“Eh...?”

When the question leaked out from between her lips, the small black figures at P-01s's feet panicked and hid in her shadow.

However, P-01s continued waving. Eventually, the ship showed its rear side. After crossing the sky above Musashi Ariadust Academy towards the east, the bow turned; and until it took its path back to Mikawa, all P-01s did was to wave at it.

The wind moved, and the automaton's hand was lowered. However, opposing P-01s (who did not turn around), Masazumi said: “...You're acting like a tourist from the country, you know.”

“Judge, on the bottom of that ship someone was waving his hand at me from the other side of the glass.”

Who that was was unknown to Masazumi, and it should have been unknown to P-01s too.

However, P-01s said this.

“He was looking this way and smiling.”

Along with those words, a sound could be heard.

It was the ring of a bell: The sound of Musashi Ariadust Academy finishing its fourth period and entering its lunch break.

Chapter 06: Fated Ones Beyond the Door

CHAPTER 6

"Fated Ones Beyond the Door"



What should we call that suddenness.
We hope for while still fearful of.

Point Allocation (Romantist)

What should we call that suddenness

We hope for while still fearful of

Point Allocation (Romantist)

•

A bell rang.

With a predetermined melody, the sound of the bell let one know when the school's noon break arrived. That was the ring that began Musashi's noon.

That sound not only reached the outdoor areas of Musashi, it was also transmitted in the ships' internal broadcast; so the people indoors were also informed.

Within one of the ships' interiors, in an underground residential area where rooms were lined up on the walls, in a three-meter-wide corridor a single boy was walking.

The boy carried a travel bag with the name "Azuma" written on it.

"...The room farthest in, huh? Even though I finished my moving quickly, I really spent a really long time with the paperwork."

On the wall of the corridor he was looking at, there was a sign that said "Okutama: Horizontal Passage 1-15 - Musashi Ariadust Academy Student Dormitory".

It was a joint residential horizontal passage placed under Musashi Ariadust Academy.

In the corridors there were many people even though it was lunch break. This was because the people who were going to work after noon were there.

With the people returning to their own rooms and the ones leaving them, the everyday sound of exchanging voices that he had not heard for a long time was audible.

A certain male student was walking together with his friends while counting up numbers on his fingers.

"...About my part-time work schedule, I think I'll add an additional hour. After

next year it'll become my full-time job, so from now on I think I'll get the clothes for outside work; but it won't be enough with the citizens' weight limit above two kilos..."

Beyond this conversation, a female student pressed a company cell-phone type divine transmitter to her ear.

"...Yeah, it is a part-time job at Suwa Shrine's contract stand, so let's bring back some eggs for our rationing on our way ba... Eh? It's a family ticket, so we can't do an individual refund. If that's the case...yeah, the horizontal passage at Okutama 1-7, you coming?"

She formed a smile. The boys walking nearby were comparing their personal armaments pulled from their waists with each other's.

"...As I thought, it is a straight sword. I think that it's good that the grip is from the imperial 'Eisenritter' brand. But you know, impacts with mobile shells are a given; so won't it be bit heavy if you install an attachment?"

They exchanged opinions.

There were similarities in the types of topics; but among all of them, the names of some celebrities would occasionally be mentioned during these conversations.

Oriotorai and Tenzou when it was an equipment-related topic, the Shintoists Asama and Shirojiro's names popping up in a talk about spells, or Naruze, Naito and Urquiaga in discussions about Europe.

...I've returned.

Last month, I was summoned by the Testament Union from my second-year summer break and I finished the restoration of my authority as well the sealing of my own powers.

Without meeting up with anyone of my same age, all I heard were things that I needed to understand. Compared to that...

...This is somehow pretty peculiar.

In fact, I felt that this atmosphere was really pleasant; so I thought that I had gotten used to this place. But if I too were to talk now, I think I would definitely

be considered a pretty peculiar person.

Thanks to the fact that he was summoned by the Testament Union, he knew a lot of things about other topics too. Azuma even knew that K.P.A. Italia's Pope-Chancellor and Tres España's Special Duties were coming to Mikawa, besides information regarding many people.

When he left the Academy, Heidi talked to him about this.

"If you're going to sell information about the Testament Union, let it be some special stuff please..."

Tonight I'm probably going to do that; I have been invited by Toori and the rest.

...Ghost hunting at night, huh.

•

Ghost hunting.

They've thought of something weird, Azuma thought.

Regarding what Toori said...

"That Apocalypse thing seems to be mainstream; I wondered if there weren't any phenomena, but when I tried looking it turned out that in our Academy there was a rumor from a long time ago that ghosts would come out! Don't you want to search a little!?"

Wasn't that kind of ghost story pretty much a given in Academies everywhere?

...Because of the disturbances in the ley lines, I wonder if that kind of small phenomenon is more likely to occur.

Just gathering at the Academy at night is an event that, even if just a bit, piques one's interests.

Last year we did something similar to this. There were some monsters coming out in a clubroom in Okutama's seventh underground floor; it was taken as an excuse to look around at night with everyone, so I joined in. If I state the outcome first...

...A huge disaster.

Toori had wrapped his entire body up to his face in gold tights, playing the role of the ghost. Getting seriously freaked out by the weird dance he did there, Asama had screamed and started rapidly firing her bow, marking the beginning of the disaster.

...I wonder what it's going to be like this year.

And I had taken interest in was what Toori had spoken of, what made this ghost hunt an "eve", that "tomorrow's confession". Who it was to seemed to be a secret, but it probably won't turn out well. The feeling that everyone in the class was really nervous about it can only mean that all of them had great expectations about it.

...What will tomorrow be like?

Well, it'll probably be something fun. Walking while smiling wryly, Azuma passed the decorative plants and the baggage left by the residents, eventually reaching the inner tip of the horizontal passage.

There was a room. A room which held the room number of his goal.

What was on the front was a six-tatami room with a sliding door. In a student dormitory where four-tatami rooms were pretty common, a six-tatami solitary room was precious. He did think about whether this had any relation to his lineage, but he decided to rethink it; *there were rooms left over, right?*

Azuma inserted the key into the sliding door's keyhole.

In that interval, there was something he noticed. The room that Azuma was to be using from now on had a sliding door, but...

...Not a paper sliding door, but a western-style sliding door made of boards? Was the previous user a European?

Because Musashi's interior was fundamentally Far East style, its sliding doors were of paper; and in the case that one wanted a western-style one, it was normal to replace it with a hinged wooden door. However, right now before his eyes was an eclectic object: a sliding door made out of boards.

...That's a strange modification. Well, it's fine; people messing with rooms is

not that rare.

In his class, it was known that Naito and Naruze modified the western rooms that they had owned.

Once, Azuma had been tasked by Oriotorai with the distribution of some topic printouts; and at that time he had seen their room. It had the structure of a workshop where half the four-tatami floor, re-coated with resin, was a closet and the other half were desks and work tables with pots and kettles. In the center were some decorations like laces and stuffed animals, and the wall bed at the side was just one meant to be shared by two people. As expected, the courage to ask the meaning of that never showed up.

Anyway, the agreement between everyone was that because there was no difference in floor level in a western room, modification was easy.

...If it's me, what would I do?

Thinking, Azuma turned the lock and opened the sliding door.

There was a room; and because it was inside the ship, there were no windows.

Six-tatami rooms have a passage one tatami wide in the middle, and on the left and right walls beds and extensions with adjustable heights that could be used as large desks existed on upper and lower levels. Therefore, in terms of structure it was a four-person room; but in order to prevent stuffiness it was usually used as a three-person room, so one of the extensions could be used freely.

However, in the room which Azuma had entered two of the extensions on the left side had been removed.

In their place was a wooden table; and furthermore...

“...Eh?”

He questioned his own gaze while looking at the front. Besides the table, there was a girl.

•

...Eh?

Azuma let his neck fall forwards.

A girl with flaxen-colored hair was seated in a large chair facing the desk.

She was in the middle of working. With a pen, she was writing words on the notes placed on the desk.

However, as she was concentrating on the notes she did not notice me.

...Uum.

Inside the room seen by his confused gaze, nothing was stuck onto the wooden walls but a calendar. As if it were a substitute, on the lower wall bed a large futon was spread out. Below the large shelf which was the top plank of the desk, there was a clothesline made of string.

Hanging on it, shirts, skirts, and things that looked like underwear were also visible.

When Azuma had confirmed everything up to that point, she suddenly looked his way. Stopping the pen with which she was writing her notes, and while she was in the middle of taking a breath, she had shifted her gaze by slightly turning her neck and stopped when she saw him.

Blue eyes; the instant he saw those, Azuma retreated.

“Ah! I-I’m sorry! It seems like I’ve mistaken my room...!”

Moving backwards, he panicked and returned to the corridor. While doing so, the sound of his travel bag hitting the sliding door was heard.

“I’m sorry!”

Saying that, he placed his hand on the sliding door and shut it. But right before it finished closing, Azuma certainly saw it. Beyond the closing sliding door, the girl with flaxen-colored hair had opened her eyes wide and was looking at him.

And Azuma noticed something else. That was...

...That large chair.

A wheelchair.

“__”

Now he understood why he needed to close the sliding door with great force and the reason why it was a western-style sliding door.

In a state where one is riding a wheelchair, opening doors sure is inconvenient.

However, with a sliding door all one has to do is slide it to the side. You can open it doing the same from the outside or the inside, and the wheelchair won't hit the door. So if that's the case...

...That was a room modified for the sake of that person.

Azuma raised his face and looked at the name plate case above the sliding door. The name plate displaying the name of the resident had a paper with a handwritten name written on it inserted inside.

"Miriam Poqou..."

He muttered and nodded. Azuma looked at the residential guide in his hand, but the number of his designated room was not mistaken. If that was the case, saying to the girl inside that he had gotten the room wrong was not a valid excuse.

...Who should I consult about this?

Azuma sighed and spun on his heels. First he had to go to the horizontal passage management room which handled the management of the residence.

•

The sunlight was below the sky which started to change from noon towards afternoon.

Musashi descended at the mountain surface on Mikawa's north side, towards the valley on which "Kakamigahara - Matsudaira Family" was written in greenery.

To the southwest of Musashi's own special continental port which Musashi entered as if sinking into, the flat ground which had been leveled from the mountains expanded outwards in continuity to the flat ground-type common-use continental port where Aerial Ships from other countries landed.

To the south of the special continental port which Musashi entered, and to

the east of the common-use continental port, there was a large city with its surroundings full of countryside settlements and fields.

It was Mikawa, the owner of Musashi; and which while being the representative of the Far East had opposed the Testament Union by forming a formal alliance with the Oda family who had absorbed the Ottomans, the enemies of Europe. This was the territory of the Matsudaira family.

And Musashi, sinking its body towards the place of its own settlement, activated the warning sirens of all of its eight ships at the same time.

It was the clamor that made it known that Musashi had stopped.

●Mikawa Surroundings Outline Map●

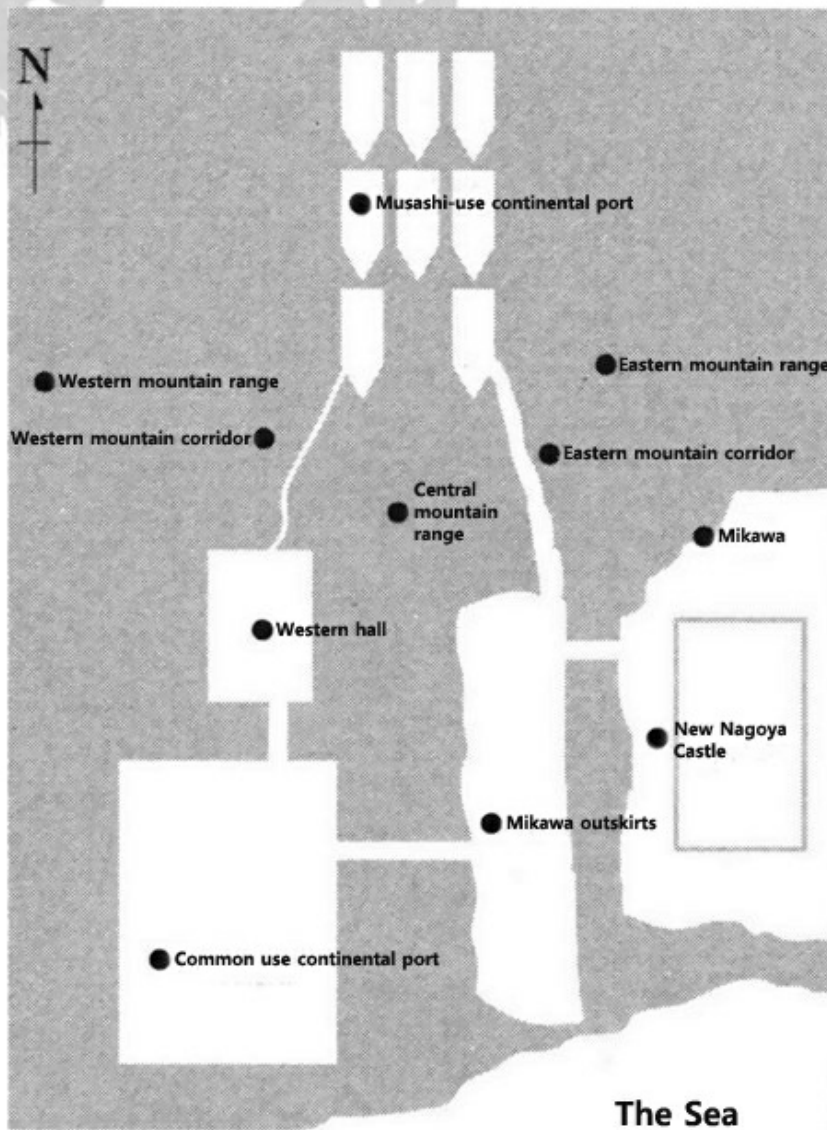


"Sis! Sis! We've arrived at Mikawa, so teach me about the area!"



"Guess there's no helping it...first of all, the outline of the surroundings is something like this."

■Mikawa Surroundings Summary Map



※The western mountain corridor is very rugged; nothing but centaurs can move across it. (This is so that Gods of War and large armies from Musashi cannot invade the common-use continental port used by other countries.)



"Alllriggght! Then, while munching a miso pork cutlet kishimen and chicken-flavored tempura, let's go 'Oohhhhh, ahhhhhhh' and have uiro as finisher!"



"...Nobody cares about you, so please go crawl in front of Nagoya's people."

Study: **Mikawa Surroundings Outline Map**

Toori: “Sis! Sis! We’ve arrived at Mikawa, so teach me about the area!”

Kimi: “Guess there’s no helping it...first of all, the outline of the surroundings is something like this.”

■ **Mikawa Surroundings Summary Map**

[From most northwards to most southwards.]

- Musashi-use continental port
- Eastern mountain range
- Western mountain range
- Western mountain corridor
- Eastern mountain corridor
- Central mountain range
- Mikawa
- Western hall
- New Nagoya Castle
- Mikawa outskirts
- Common use continental port

The Sea

※ The western mountain corridor is very rugged; nothing but centaurs can move across it.

(This is so that Gods of War and large armies from Musashi cannot invade the common-use continental port used by other countries.)

Toori: “Alllriggght! Then, while munching a miso pork cutlet **kishimen** and chicken-flavored tempura, let’s go ‘Oohhhhh, ahhhhhhh’ and have **uiro** as finisher!”

Kimi: “...Nobody cares about you, so please go crawl in front of Nagoya’s people.”

Chapter 07: Philosophers Atop the Stairs

CHAPTER 7

"Philosophers Atop the Stairs"



If there is a person who should be able to speak.
Speak of the person who should speak.
Speak together of the person who should speak.

Point Allocation (Dissertation)

If there is a person who should be able to speak

Speak of the person who should speak

Speak together of the person who should speak

Point Allocation (Dissertation)

•

“Alright, we will now be having the special student council and chancellor’s officers meeting.”

In a high position, a boy’s voice was brought to life atop a wooden bridge under a slightly past noon sky.

On the frontal bridge of Musashi Ariadust Academy in the center trailing ship - Okutama - and atop the stairs which ascended towards the front door, many uniformed figures could be seen.

Toori was at the center, surrounded by Kimi and Tenzou along with Shirojiro and Heidi. The boy who had just spoken was Neshinbara, who was tapping a torii-design keyboard that was being displayed in the air.

“The topic of today’s meeting is: ‘Let’s make Aoi-kun’s confession succeed!’ This is brought to you with my sponsorship, the Secretary Neshinbara. Everyone, you can just slam him with whatever you have, got it? Then, Aoi-kun, it’s all in your hands.”

“Mmm, if we suddenly decide just to think about the ratings, it’d be more interesting if I end up getting rejected, right?”

“The interested party himself says that from the beginning!?”

Toori glanced around at everybody.

“The hell is this, all of you!? Can’t I be rejected!? I get it. That’s a repression of results-oriented behavior isn’t it!? Faced with that kind of society which doesn’t acknowledge a guy who’s down on his luck, I^[8] want to firmly object! Is that alright? ...You don’t think that just anybody can get married, right!? Nor do you! Or you!!”

Everybody held down Toori, who had started pointing at people who were

returning home as a result of his rampage, and stopped him. Sanyou, who had been pointed at approximately the fifth time, had run away while crying; but everyone was unable to follow-up until that point.

Anyways, Toori, who had been made to sit, took a breath and looked at Tenzou, sitting next to him wearing a ninja cap.

“Hey Tenzou, going in a basic level, how does someone confess? If we get to numbers, you’re pretty used to it right?”

“Ri-right now, I have been rejected a lot, you know!? That’s the truth, you know!?”

“It’s fine, just answer the question.”

Tenzou folded his arms and nodded. Afterward, he raised his right index finger.

“The admirable method is to be completely honest with a sudden confession. No matter who, all people have something called a readiness of the heart. Because Toori-dono, if during the morning a girl you do not know is standing in front of your house and just says to you ‘I love you,’ ...wouldn’t that be amazing? ...So you do not need it! Preparation of the heart, that’s something you do not need!”

“True. However, if that girl was Tenzou I’d be pretty disgusted. After you stand in front of my house nervously hoping just for the sake of confessing to me, I’d without a doubt would run away before your sanity level drops.”

“You’re horrible!!”

“...Hey, your secretary thinks that the two of you have to take this seriously!”

At the voice of Neshinbara, who continued to tap his keyboard to write the meeting log, both folded their arms.

After a while, Tenzou raised his right index finger once again.

“...For starters, how about the ‘letter method’?”

Tenzou took out a pen and notepad from his chest.

“What?” Being the destination of everyone’s gazes, Tenzou passed the pen

and notepad to Toori's hands.

"Don't you think that this would work? During a confession, people always get flustered. For example, you might think you were saying 'I love you,' but you enter a panic and what you really let out is 'I love you, man!' or you seriously stutter and what bursts out is 'I w-wuvvv you!' or if you force yourself to do it cheerfully like 'lilililil loooveess Kimililil yoou knowwww—!?' So in the end, you end up failing at your honest confession by spouting some nonsense like that."

"You really have a lot of experience. This is reassuring; but be a little more tolerant, you're a ninja after all."

"Lectured! I am really being lectured right now!"

"Don't worry about it, Tenzou. What does this notepad and pen have to do with your happy stories of failure?"

Tenzou cracked a finger.

"It is simple. Itemize everything you want to tell her in advance. Then, give her a letter rather than telling her outright."

Tenzou nodded.

"If you do it this way, there won't be a problem even if you get flustered; because if you are embarrassed, you can return home just like that. Furthermore, even if this ends with the other party not responding immediately, this is really reassuring as even a response by letter would be good."

"Hey, hey, is this when the failure stories of getting rejected by that method are going to start? We have a good atmosphere right now!"

"I-I am sorry! The atmosphere has become awkward!"

However, Toori looked at the notepad and said "But, y'know..." to Tenzou and repeated it again.

"In short, I just gotta write down why I fell for her in this?"

"Well, officially on a piece of paper, but it should be fine to summarize what you think up here."

“Mmmmm... Don’t really want to do it. Y’know why? These kinds of workings of love and hate, they can’t really be put into words well, can they?”

The one who responded to those words was not Tenzou, but Kimi, who was leaning her body up against the railing of the bridge. While her hair fluttered in the wind, she looked at Toori.

“Fufufu, foolish brother, there’s no good way to put emotions or things like love or hate into words, you say? What a cute line. If that’s so, try to write down what you dislike about that eroge-ninja as a test.”

“No, Sis, there’s no way I could put stuff like what I dislike about my friend into words well, could I?”

•How I think about whether he is really human, hiding his face all the time, is something that I can’t put it into words very well.

•How I wonder whether using “de gozaru^[9]” as a sentence ending is meant to be a gag or not, is something that I can’t put it into words very well.

•How I really wish he’d do something about the fact that sometimes a dog smell comes from his clothes, is something that I can’t put it into words very well.

“Like I thought, the bad areas of my friend are something that I can’t really put into words.”

“Yo-you just wrote them down without any trouble! You did! And in bullet points!”

“Hmm? That’s weird. I can’t write anything about your good areas though. Sigh...”

“The hell is that ‘Sigh...’!? This guy is the worst!!”

Tenzou grabbed Toori’s collar and shook him, but Toori continued smirking. Kimi drew her body from the railing and stood behind Toori.

“Fufufu, foolish brother, putting that aside, haven’t we been able to practice with a good stepping stone? If that’s so, now try writing down the good areas of the lady inside your heart.”

“Eeh? Again, Sis is making me do something really difficult. Tenzou’s

unpleasant features are so obvious, so apparent that I can do it easily; but she is... That's right, she is in my heart, you know!? My heart! Do you think that the workings of my pure soul can be properly put into words so easily!?"

- How her face is totally my type, is something that I can't put into words very well.

- How I can see what looks like her panties beneath her apron when she squats, is something I can't put into words very well.

- How I can't describe the amazing curve going from her waist to her butt, is something that I can't put into words very well.

"Mmm, like I thought, my pure soul is something that I can't put into words all that well."

"...You are spouting it as if it is nothing, though!"

"Don't be so noisy, Tenzou. If I were to seriously do it, it wouldn't end with just with this...!"

"Wait, wait...! That bulleted list is missing something of dire importance to Toori."

The person who said those words was a massive figure seated two steps down, the half-dragon Urquiaga.

Bending his arms, which were also frontal wings, he rubbed his chin with the small hand within it.

"As far as I can see...there is some mystery here given Toori's usual tastes."

"Eh? There's something missing from what Toori-kun usually prefers?"

Urquiaga nodded at Heidi, as she was the one who asked that.

"...You are a citizen of the boobs camp, yet you've failed to mention the boobs of said person."

At Urquiaga's words, everyone drew a breath of surprise and looked at Toori.

In the surroundings, even the students going home from school slightly stopped the movements of their bodies in response to the words said just now.

"Have I by any chance become the authority in that?"

While speaking, Toori nodded with a serious face. And when he slowly sucked in a breath, his expression stilled and he began to run his pen down the paper.

“That’s it. In short... *If I do not try Fondling those breasts which she bears I will not know them.*”

“Don’t just read the first line of a poem so indifferently!!”

At everyone’s tsukkomi, Toori frowned and folded his arms.

“What should I do for the *word about the seasons*?”

“Fufufu, foolish brother, I just shuddered from the beauty in your simplicity just now. However...”

Kimi sat next to Toori and rested her chin on her folded arms.

“What’s the real reason for you not bringing up the boob topic at this teenagers’ discussion about your target’s charms?”

“Sis, right now I’m just like in that song about yearning for boobs I wrote once. I haven’t fondled them, so I don’t know.”

“Fufufu, in short...when it comes to her boobs, you can’t really judge them? Such honesty!”

The answering little brother raised the hand that his sister was holding.

“Even if I look like this, I’m really serious about it! I won’t just say anything I’d like!”

“...I really don’t care about how weird the workings of these siblings’ heads’ are, but the boob talking in these last minutes has undeniably gone over its yearly limit.”

“Fufufu, please shut up, you loser ninja. Foolish brother, even if it’s just like in your song, are we not dealing with something that can be roughly measured just by looking at it? Someone like Asama’s look more or less the same.”

The same instant Kimi spoke, a window on the third floor of the school building opened behind them. It was the window of a classroom that was being used for the activities of the tea ceremony club.

“Hey! Don’t just do body trivia of other people as you feel! Stuff like ‘it’s

around the same,’ or ‘the looks are around the same!’ ”

“She is right! Asama’s ones aren’t as they look! Within the sphere they are a little...”

“Uwa, saying that like a sommelier is the worst...! Wait...don’t move from there!! My bow! MY BOW!!”

“Hey, hey, has the tea ceremony club recently started performing archery?”

Facing Toori, who had taken out a writing implement and had begun to write “100 points” on the top of Tenzou’s ninja cap as he was sitting next to him, his sister tilted her neck.

“Anyways, idiot brother, let’s keep this serious talking to the point and continue with you... As the good and the bad points of her boobs cannot be judged by visual information, what are you going to do if you come to realize that ‘this won’t do’, from a sommelier’s point of view, after you started going out with her? You have to test it once, don’t you?”

“Test? Test what?”

“...You should ask someone with similar boobs to let you grope hers; it’s obvious that she’d let you fondle them, isn’t it?”

Simultaneously with Kimi’s words, atop the bridge and even in the schoolyard below it people evacuated from within a thirty-meter radius. First the girls left, then the boys hid their chests and briskly walked away like penguins as well.

Atop the bridge, which had become silent, Toori looked at his sister.

“Sis, you’re amazing! You’re so smart but aren’t you also an idiot!?”

“Fufu, foolish brother, the thoughts of a genius cannot be understood by anyone but the genius herself. Loneliness is wonderful! Then, how do you think that her boobs feel? You have three selections ranging from HARD/NORMAL/EASY... Or is it HELL!?”

“Mmm, I can’t say it so simply because I think she is rather advanced but... something like HARD, I believe.”

“You are saying it unreasonably simply, you know!”

“Fufu, more or less hard, huh. In other words, flat...”

Kimi looked around the area, focusing on the few people on the stairs.

“I see, Adele, Suzu or Sanyou-sensei maybe?”

“Sis! Sis! Having a teacher also included in your list of names, you do not discriminate right!?”

“Fufufu, idiot brother, your sister is not the one who chooses the measures. I don’t choose the goal either, though. For now, just think about the groping! Only the fondling! Well, other than that, it’s that or...”

“...? What are you doing sitting here?”

As if interrupting Kimi’s words, a voice sounded from the school building.

Turning around, from the entrance of the school building, two figures were coming.

“President Sakai...”

At everyone’s voice, Sakai raised his hand with a “Yo.” The other person walking beside Sakai was a girl shouldering an enormous leather bag across both her shoulders. A girl who had, at the top of her rather tall body, a massive silver-fringed coiffure and sharp golden eyes. The name of this girl, who was shaking the five large bundles of her hair which was rolled into rings as it cascaded down her back, was spoken by Kimi.

“Mitotsudaira. Are you descending to Mikawa with President Sakai?”

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At that question, Mitotsudaira shook her head with a small motion and narrowed her sharp eyes.

“There is no way that I, a knight charged with a Matsudaira branch family, would go to Mikawa while they are creating gifts for P.A. Oda, is there? It’s just that given my authority as a branch family member, I need to give President Sakai a certificate allowing him to descend there.”

Toori turned his smile to Sakai, who had responded by saying “Yeah, that’s right.”

“President, you’re even going to Mikawa’s center in Nagoya? You sure got one hell of a permission.”

“It’s because a comrade from long ago called me out... It’s been ten years and he’s probably changed a lot, so I will probably come back soon after I get to drink with him. There are a lot of rumors about Mikawa today given its closure policy, so if I stay there for long the Testament Union will suspect me, you know?”

When Sakai ended that line, Shirojiro raised his hand.

“President Sakai, we’re the ones paying for your trip, so could you take a look at the monetary flow for me? ...I’m talking about Mikawa during this last year. For some reason all they are doing is selling without buying any of our exports. An even larger amount of sales came when we entered the port, so currently we are in an arrangement where the importers are squabbling over the warehouses.”

“Earlier, that lord professor was talking about some ‘fireworks’. I wonder if this has something to do with that.”

“I wonder,” said Shirojiro, and everyone tilted their heads and murmured.

In response, without going deeper into that, Sakai said.

“Well, I’ll be careful... Toori, there is some kind of rumor about how you are going to confess to someone... Who is the person that is going to get reached by that kind of dangerous behavior...?”

“It’s Horizon.”

At that line, everyone fell silent and Sakai looked up at the sky. After a while, he said: “...So you actually think so too?”

“It’s alright for you to say that, President? Last year when you went to see her after being consulted by Asama and Neshinbara, you avoided giving any comments about it, right? It’s your way to not talk about the important stuff.”

“Yeah, that’s true...”

Sakai continued.

“But there is a chance that she’s just somebody else that happens to

resemble her. Actually, that's the most probable outcome, right?"

"I know. That's why I've watched her for a whole year, just like a stalker. That way if it happened that I was just chasing after her looks, I'd be just a stalker in the wrong. So well, when had I watched her for a year..."

"Not just in the wrong; that's the official definition of stalker, isn't it? ...But well, what happened when you had watched her for a year?"

Facing him, Toori spoke. He was still smiling.

"The facial features and body are different from what they were ten years ago, so it's another person. I thought that if I was just chasing the past that would have bothered me; but after watching her for a whole year I understood that the past didn't matter, I was just so captivated by that side of her that tried her best at what she did. At first, the only thought I had was this."

He breathed.

"If she really is Horizon, I have no right to get close to her. ...But, step by step, I considered that if she is really here, then it is just fine. Eventually, I ended up thinking that I wanted to talk to her, I wanted to try to touch her. That's what I believe now... Even if she is not Horizon..."

"Even if she isn't?"

"I may be damn incapable, but I hope she'll stay by my side."

"I see," Sakai said. Sighing and breathing out the smoke from his tobacco, he said it again.

"When did you decide that?"

"About a week ago... It got in my head when I was thinking how Horizon died around this time ten years ago; it just seemed natural for me. I'd hate it if she'd be here while I do nothing. So I decided to confess how I feel. It'll probably end up as a one-sided confession, but..."

"But?"

"Tomorrow it will have been ten years. That is the time limit; I won't think about Horizon as someone to run from anymore."

He nodded.

“...She doesn’t know who she is, right? Therefore, the confession will go well; and if she wishes for it I was thinking that we’d find out about it together. A lot of things will probably happen because of that, but because I won’t treat Horizon as someone to run from... It’ll be alright.”

“I see,” Sakai dropped his gaze with an expression which could be said to be a wry smile. He stroked that chin with the hand that was in his pockets.

“These last ten years were quick, weren’t they. That accident was just after I came here.”

“That’s right.” Kimi nodded and then she sighed.

“But you’re stupid, foolish brother. You should write what you said just now on the letter. It’s a bit long, so I think that it’d be better if you made it simpler though. A-l-s-o...”

“Also?”

“Yes,” Kimi nodded again.

“There’s still one problem which hasn’t been resolved...whether you can take HARD or not.”

“Hard?”

Mitotsudaira was frowning, listening to the conversation from beside Sakai.

Aside from shallowly folding her arms, Mitotsudaira was tilting her head looking at Kimi through narrowed eyes.

“Does the chancellor have some sort of problem? Well, he is certainly someone who always has some issues; but what is it this time?”

“Eh, I’ll say it so it’s easy to understand.”

Kimi said this.

“Mitotsudaira... You are a perfect match for resolving a problem plaguing Toori.”

At Kimi's words, Mitotsudaira slightly tilted her head.

What is going on? she thought, and inside her heart...

...She felt something strange.

Nodding within her heart, she looked back and forth between the sitting Toori and Kimi.

"Truthfully, I do not really understand; but that talk about a problem and a perfect match is an exaggeration, right?"

"An exaggeration? That's stupid, Mitotsudaira... For my foolish brother, this is the most important event of his whole lifetime, you know? In any case, it's a serious matter pertaining to his confession tomorrow."

At the words she was told, Mitotsudaira moved her eyebrows.

"A matter concerning the chancellor's confession tomorrow?"

"Yeah, that's right." Kimi nodded in response to the question, and Mitotsudaira brought her hand to a single cheek.

...*Confession.*

I understand very well the importance that kind of event holds for them. Even in light novels, manga, theater or TV dramas, this is a subject that always comes up.

"...Well, I suppose that it might be something hard to understand for a knight of the Mitotsudaira branch of the Matsudaira family."

Being told that, Mitotsudaira felt that a slight crack form within her heart.

...*Indeed, I am a knight who was sent here for the sake of receiving the provisional inheritance of the name Mito Matsudaira.*

"As a member of my family presented from Hexagone Française to the Far East, it is true that things like marriage are decided by my home country, my parents and the Testament's recreation of history; so I have no connection with the practices of commoners such as free confessions of romance."

"But," Mitotsudaira said.

"Eventually I will become a normal person and a part of the Far East as a

whole... So it's not like I don't know the ways of the commoners."

"If that's so..."

Mitotsudaira tapped her own chest lightly with the palm of her right hand and stuck it out.

"You will never find a knight unwilling to help a commoner. To be able to resolve this problem, no matter what it may be, I, Nate Mitotsudaira will give my all. Then, Chancellor, what is your wish?"

Having been asked, Toori turned her way. However, while standing there he folded his arms and tilted his head.

"Mmm... I guess it's a little hard to say though?"

"You are not someone very clear, you know... I will lend you my strength, so be bold."

"No, if I say it clearly, you'll get mad. If I say it boldly... I'll be killed."

"Huh?" Mitotsudaira tilted her head forwards and looked around the area. Each person who was there at the stairs, with the exception of Kimi, nodded at the words which had just been spoken.

...This is...

Mitotsudaira thought that she had a bad feeling about this.

In any case, these people being up to something no good is very frequent. The day before, I was meeting with some high-classed guests, business partners of the Mitotsudaira family, over lunch at a restaurant in Tama; when Toori, Kimi and the others appeared like a horrible avalanche.

Even though I tried to kick them out, my guests tried to be well-mannered and all my efforts were rendered null. But being forced to sit with people they did not know was nothing. Toori, knowing they had gourmet tastes, ordered some beer and started an argument.

"Geezer! Geezer! Is true that you are saying that any kind of food is delicious!?"

"Ha, hahahaha, no matter what kind of food it is, finding its good points and

enjoying them is common sense.”

“Hah!? Are you serious!? Then, chef! These gourmets said they can eat dog! They really are brave!”

...The specialty cook who was at their side, face pale, raised his empty teacup and chopsticks with his two hands. What did that mean?

Anyways, in the end, a completely naked gourmet ended up running home while crying, and I had lost one client.

...Thinking about it again, it was a huge hindrance to business...!

At that time I had gotten rather angry; but this time I am receiving a warning.

Therefore, it cannot be that bad.

“Judge. ...Then, for safety’s sake, let me verify first. What could you possibly wish from me?”

“Well, that’s...”

Toori, standing right in front of me, averted his gaze slightly and scratched his head. Then, he...

“Just a little practice; or rather, I want you to be my rehearsal partner.”

At those words, Sakai who stood next to me crooked his neck.

“A rehearsal? In short, that’s a practice of your confession, isn’t it? Again, that’s...”

“Stupid”; I was glanced at by Sakai, who had said that, out of the corner of his eye. It seemed as if he wanted to say, “I wonder if you can.”

Mitotsudaira thought that if that is the case...

...Th-there is not really anything stupid about it, right?

A confession, she was interested in that. Therefore, she cleared her throat and shrugged her shoulders exaggeratedly.

“So, Chancellor? ...In other words, you are using me as a substitute for the person you are confessing to, true?”

Mitotsudaira took a breath and touched her waist with her hand, while

staring into his face.

“...Indeed, so it’s like that. If I think about it with regards to my pride as a woman, it’s true that it’s something I could get mad over. This is something like ‘You have no worth compared to the person I will confess to, but you look like her so I will use you’, after all.”

“Mmm, I don’t know if I think you don’t have any worth, it was just something I decided on seeing you.”

“Judge, very well; I do not really understand, but I am indebted to you...”

Mitotsudaira nodded. Forcing power into her eyebrows, she stuck her chest out.

“I am fine with it. I, Nate Mitotsudaira, for the sake of being your rehearsal...”

Mitotusudaira thought about what she should say in this situation.

...For the sake of being your rehearsal...?

Certainly, if we got with what was trendy lately...in a situation like this where you accept a higher-rank or lower-rank’s wish to be a practice partner for them, there should be some sort of expression. Therefore, Mitotsudaira lightly tapped her chest with the fingers of her hand, and said it.

“Eh, I...will lend you this chest.”

The instant she said that, Mitotsudaira was bathed in everyone’s sudden reactions.

“Eeh!?” Pressured by the voices of shock coming from all directions, Mitotsudaira wondered.

...Huh?

Sweeping the area with her gaze, not only Toori, Kimi and everyone on the stairs, but everybody who was for some reason peeking this way from around a thirty meters radius turned their voices and gazes to her.

I do not understand why, but I could feel a hint of admiration in everyone’s murmurs of surprise.

...I-is it really something to make so much noise about?

Slightly unsettled, as if confirming, she spoke towards the murmuring Toori and company.

“U-um, just because I said that I would lend this chest for the sake of the rehearsal of Chancellor’s confession...”

Having said that, once again, everyone started murmuring. Other than them wondering if she was serious...

“She said it twice! She said it twice, you know!”

“Wow, as expected, a knight’s dedication is amazing...”

“Certainly, in terms of position and in terms of durability, a human shield...!”

I did not comprehend the last one, but still, I was able to understand that this was something earthshaking.

...We-well, everyone else also seems to be hoping in me.

If I refuse to cooperate at this stage, I will lose everyone’s support. Being aboard the small Musashi, as a knight who takes charge of numerous villages as her territory I wish to avoid that kind of development.

Beside me, Sakai, who like me does not understand the meaning of what is going on, is processing the reaction of the area.

“Well, do your best... I’ll be going to Mikawa now.”

Everyone said farewell or bowed, and Sakai left. When he was descending the stairs, he spoke.

“I’ll be meeting up with Masazumi, is there something you want to say?”

“I’ll be making some noise here at eight o’clock, could you ask whether or not he can come?”

“Judge, judge.” Sakai raised his hand lightly, and forming a smile at the edge of his mouth, he descended.

Mitotsudaira saw that in front of her, Toori was looking her way with a serious face...

“Alright then, Nate, let’s do it... I’ll do it tightly, alright? Afterward, don’t hit me, alright?”

Responding to that question, Mitotsudaira started by calming her breathing. Calming herself by doing that, through pulling aside her fringe, she corrected her posture.

“It’s true that knights are allowed the possession of weapons, but that is just for the sake of protecting the people. On my pride as one of werewolf lineage, I will not do something like that... But is there really some sort of dangerous prerequisite to the rehearsal of a confession?”

“Then, I won’t hold back.”

Along with his words, Mitotsudaira felt a sensation on her chest.

...Eh?

Looking, two sets of Toori’s five fingers were shallowly buried in the chest of her uniform.

•

Not being able to understand what was happening, Mitotsudaira sucked in a shallow breath.

“...U-um.”



Mitotsudaira Nate

“Wait, Nate, please be quiet. Right now, I’m in the middle of the confirmation.”

Perplexed by how the current situation was advancing in a way she was not being told, Mitotsudaira lost her words.

...Um, this is...

As she was thinking, she realized that heat was steadily building up in her face. Wondering about what that was all about, she remained not giving an answer.

“I wonder how it is.”

Toori lowered his body, bringing his brown haired head to her chest.

“Mm.”

While his ear was pressed against her chest, she could faintly smell the fragrance of his hair. Mitotsudaira noticed he used the same shampoo as his sister. Her unconscious mind was shouting to make her notice something more important right now.

...Bu-but, this situation...

Right now, an ear is being pressed against my chest while it’s being groped. That’s reality. The sentence “rehearsal for a confession” and what is happening right now before my eyes does not compute. What is happening? If I were to speak in French, then I would say “Quoi?”

Could it be that there was a mistake in how I’ve reacted up till now?

I do not know. What should I do? The best idea that my mind is having right now is to slaughter the idiot before me with my own two hands, but a midday killing is just risky. If I were to do it, it should be done at nighttime.

However, disregarding that, what should I do right now?

...U-um...

Like that, seconds passed by. Everyone was speechless and the silence continued.

“...I see.”

Toori took his hands and ear off my chest.

As if matching that movement everyone leaned forward and focused their eyes on Toori.

“...How was it, Toori-dono!?”

“Yeah,” Toori nodded and stuck his thumb up for all to see.

“She wasn’t wearing a bra!”

“Ooh.” Everyone muttered.

Is there no limit to the exposure of personal information?

However, Toori moved. After returning a nod to everyone, he looked my way with a refreshing smile.

“Thanks a lot, Mitotsudaira! Thanks to you, I’ve completed one of my self-researches!”

Sticking up his right thumb.

“I...am all right!”

“You are not all right at all, you idioooottt...!!”

After she cried, the spell seal on her body was released and she hammered Toori against the railing with a single right backhand.

The railing was unable to completely take the force of Toori’s body which was spinning and flying away.

“—!”

With a cracking sound, the railing twisted and broke, and with the excess energy Toori’s body flew towards the school courtyard along with it. Mitotsudaira turned her gaze and sighed towards all the people running around in the schoolyard.

“You really were an idiot from the beginning! Think yourself lucky I was not wearing any personal equipment! Really...”

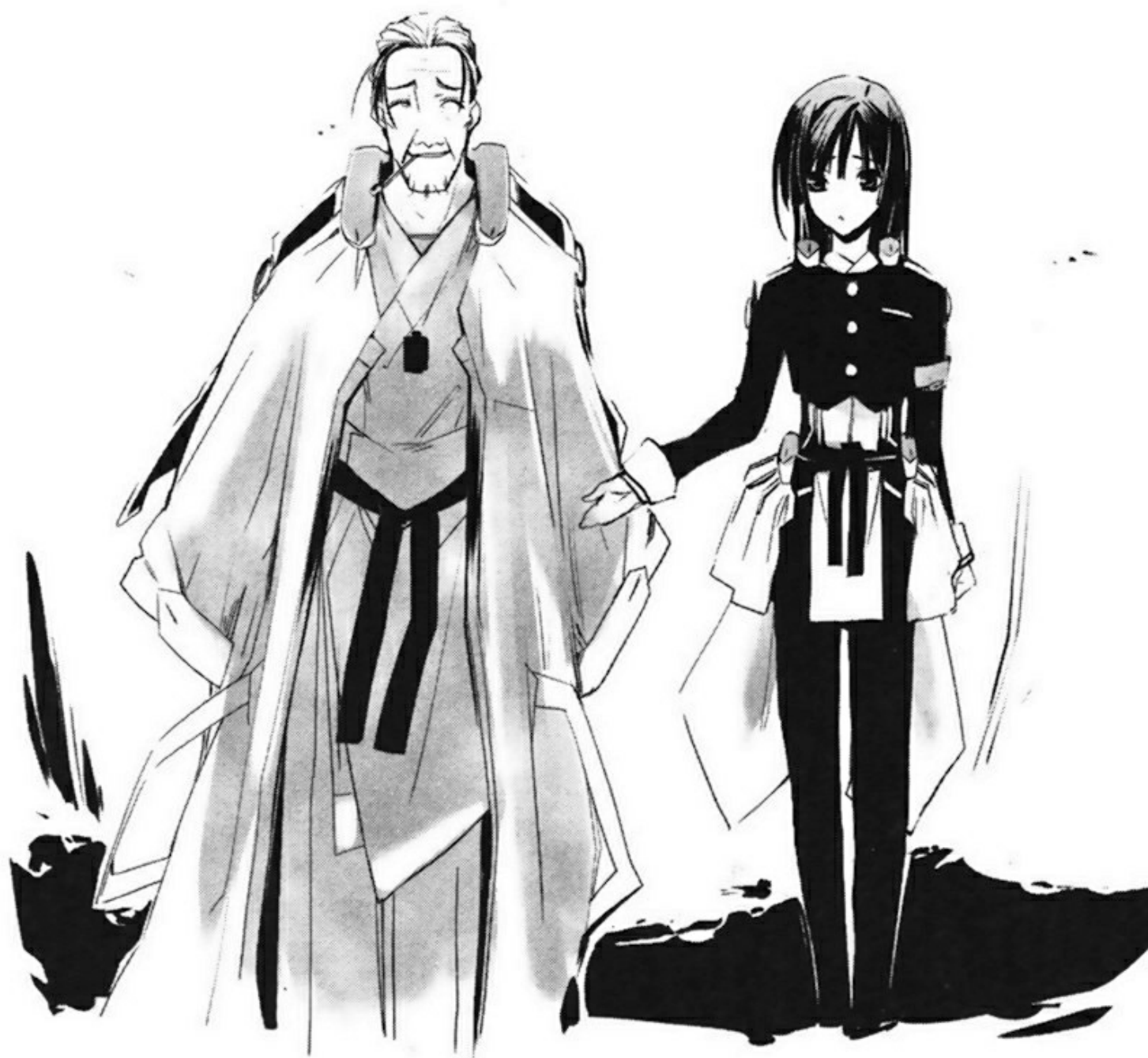
Lightly wiping away the tears in the corners of her eyes with a finger, she straightened her eyebrows.

“...It would be nice if you were rejected tomorrow!!”

Chapter 08: Doubters in the Depths of a Ravine

CHAPTER 8

"Doubters in the Depths of a Ravine"



To go and to return is the path there and back.

If so.

To descend and to ascend is a valley's path and...

Point Allocation (Life)

To go and to return is the path there and back

If so

To descend and to ascend is a valley's path and...

Point Allocation (Life)

•

On the mountainside, bathing in the light of noon, there was a wooden structure.

It was a sentry house built on the surface of the mountain, where “Kakamigahara” was written with trees. It was beside the eastern mountain corridor which connects Musashi’s continental port with the streets below, so it was a building positioned to look down upon the mountain checkpoint.

The building had two figures atop its six-tatami structure.

Two people in crimson uniforms with Tres España’s emblem were holding their rifles and sitting in chairs.

They were exchanging words as one of them was watching the mountain and the other its base. At the moment, the one wearing a senior uniform was looking to the mountain range.

“...As expected, we had a lot of transport squads today. Has the confusion at the checkpoint over here ended yet?”

The boy watching Mikawa, which was at the foot of the mountain, nodded. Then he looked at the base’s checkpoint with the scope of his rifle.

“...Right now, the foot is pretty packed. Recently they’ve been saying that it’d be quicker to detour over to the other side, to the western corridor which connects to the common use continental port where our squad is; but there are things like wooden bridges there, and the roads are pretty narrow. Gods of war and large wagons can’t travel it, so they had to send out transport ships all the way to the western side.”

“That was quite detailed. Are you an immigrant from Mikawa?”

“Tes,” the boy responded.

“I’m a naturalized citizen of Tres España. Due to Lord Motonobu’s ‘clearing out’ ten years ago and the construction of New Nagoya Castle, I’m not Shinto but Catholic now. I’m even making an angels’ community fansite on the net.”

The boy gestured towards the town of Mikawa with his rifle.

In response, his senior turned his neck back, and at the end of his sight was the center segment of Nagoya City.

There was a street in the town that was facing the sea at the base of the mountain. A brown structure was covering a large portion of its center. The flat surface that extended almost the entire territory of Nagoya City was...

“With such a simple design you don’t really get its true size, but that wooden structure ranges ten kilometers from east to west and eleven north to south. That’s the ‘New Nagoya Castle’, a large atelier that uses one unified reactor and four ley line reactors which are forbidden in all the Testament Tsrhcian territories since the Harmonic Unification War. The previous Nagoya city was modified into that at the request of P.A. Oda ten years ago. It’s a workshop born from the ‘clearing out’ national policy.”

“The ‘clearing out’, huh...”

The senior, who had an upperclassman’s attitude, glanced at the side of his junior’s face.

“That’s such a crazy story... As the inheritance of names of historical figures is needed for the sake of the Testament’s history recreation, they made all names but those of a few important officials go to automatons to avoid all the chaos it results in. Was your family affected as well?”

“Well, we were at a very low position, so we did not have much trouble at first. After that, with the reduction of staff expenses and the protection of classified information, three thousand automatons took charge of the town’s business and administration over a period of three years; so that was when true ‘clearing out’ began, along with a lot of problems.”

The junior shrugged his shoulders, and trying to avoid that topic he peered at New Nagoya Castle through his scope.

“This ‘clearing out’ was not just about the automatons. With the four

operational ley line reactors in New Nagoya Castle extracting ether from the ley lines, strange phenomena became very frequent in the town center. I'm talking about stuff like monsters wandering the night, roads warping and mysterious disappearances."

"Those kinds of things," the junior smiled bitterly.

"So with all of that, people left. That was the 'clearing out'. That castle is messed up, you know? From its design and construction, the only ones managing and knowing all about it are the leader of the Matsudaira, 'Yes-Man' Lord Motonobu and a few of his closest subjects and officers. All the actual work on its construction was carried out by 1200 additional automatons ordered from Sagami province, and even now they are operating it from the inside."

He breathed.

"The inside is segmented into several floors protected by barriers, so its scale is pretty big; but the only ones who know what is happening inside are Lord Motonobu and a few more individuals. The automatons are subjected to memory controls and if they try to break the confidentiality protection they will automatically erase their own memories."

"Even so, there was a special squadron from Hexagone Française that sneaked inside looking for information, right?"

The junior gave a small laugh at his upperclassman's words.

"And one week later they were found carrying paper bags as otaku in Nihonbashi, weren't they? Not only did they somehow have no memory of what had happened, strangely enough they were also totally naked with two-colored tattoos of little girls on their asses... After that no other country sent more squads, fearing the embarrassment."

He breathed again.

"The Tsirhc Testament Union spread rumors about 'the dangers of a ley line reactor meltdown' because they considered them dangerous, didn't they? They even remade the opera 'Sodom and Gomorrah Have Disappeared!' which had been about a time when one of those meltdowns happened and everything in a

ten kilometer radius was annihilated, into some mournful tragedy across all Europe. By now, nobody lives in the surroundings other than the automatons and Lord Motonobu. Yesterday I tried to descend to the outskirts, but...”

The junior tapped the upperclassman’s shoulder and pointed at the village with his finger.

“...Although it’s already noon, you can’t see any smoke from people cooking; and nothing in the vicinity of the city center is even moving. And in the surrounding villages, strange words were written in blood on the walls... I returned immediately, you know.”

“I see... Mikawa sure is a troublesome country.”

The instant the senior figure spoke that line, the younger figure pointed towards the mountain road.

“Ah, look at the road descending to the checkpoint. Amazingly, those two seem to be...the Musashi Academy President Sakai Tadatsugu and the Student Council Vice President Honda Masazumi. Nimble even walking, just like the rumors, right? After the Academy President of Musashi was demoted and sent away from Mikawa, he became a disgruntled and strange person.”

Just as he said, there were two people on the path leading down to the checkpoint. The senior confirmed them with the scope of his rifle as they passed by messengers, wagons and cargo vehicles and pressed past people with heavy baggages.

“One of the Four Heavenly Kings of the Matsudaira, spared from the stripping of his inherited name by the automatons; Sakai Tadatsugu, is it? His current position as Musashi Academy President sure is a demotion. And the other one, Masazumi...is dressed like a man but given the way he is walking...that’s a woman?”

“Tes. She may be dressed like a man, but actually...she should be a woman.”

“Should?”

At that question, the junior looked up at the sky once. Choosing his words, he talked.

“When I lived in Mikawa, there were ‘two Hondas’. One was a member of the Four Heavenly Kings of the Matsudaira, the Peerless in the East and user of the divine weapon Tonbokiri, Honda Tadakatsu. The other one was the brain of the Matsudaira, the lineage of Honda Masanobu. But when Masazumi was a child, an automaton stole the name of Masanobu’s son during the ‘clearing out’.”

“If that’s so, that girl can no longer inherit the name, can she?”

“Tes... But before that happened, she had an operation in order to inherit said name. To make sure she had the right to inherit the name Masazumi, she was supposed to have had a sex change operation to turn her into a boy... However, in the earlier stages, after her breasts were removed but before they began with the lower parts, the ‘clearing out’ happened. As she lacks breasts, female clothing does not fit her well, so she dresses like a boy.”

“When I was still in Mikawa, she was ignored and bullied. She was a year above me and I heard that since she was unable to get her inherited name, she was abandoned by her dad; but...”

While looking at the two traveling the mountain path, the junior slowly said this:

“Given that she’s now the vice president, she’s still doing her best, isn’t she... I wonder if I should make a fansite...”

•

Sakai and Masazumi were walking atop the mountain path towards the checkpoint, which was a delivery transportation base.

Looking at it from the mountain, the checkpoint was a wide parking lot where standby cargo vehicles were lined up waiting to take their goods, and a spacious area with warehouses. The valley was a natural barrier and the exchange of goods was performed between the bottom and the top. People were lined up into five queues at the reception area of the checkpoint, but Sakai was walking too far away to hear their voices and exchanges.

Sakai and Masazumi walked the mountain path, which had hardened from the wheels of the cargo vehicles. As they traveled the side of the mountain with a stone wall at their left, they laughed and exchanged words while tilting their

heads. Sakai was forming a smile at the corner of his mouth.

“...Speaking of the which, tomorrow Toori is going to confess. What are you going to do tonight? As I said before, it seems that Toori and the rest are going to make some ruckus at the Academy. Are you going to go with them and act as the fire extinguisher smokescreen?”

“I am the vice president. If I did something like that the entire Testament Union would know about it...”

“It’s alright, it’ll just make you look like the rest of them.”

“Then I definitely can’t do it, can I? Anyway, what is even with the chancellor and student council president, suddenly announcing that he’s going to confess and cause a ruckus at the Academy like that... The other day we had a huge meeting for a potluck in the dark, and he ignited the experimental-use magnesium with the lab room’s alcohol lamp and it went ‘Boom!’ ”

“Yeah, you can’t make night potluck into a light potluck. I guess the glass pot of the lamp lightened everyone up, though.” [\[10\]](#)

“No, it wasn’t like that, seriously...”

Sakai laughed in response to Masazumi who was speaking in a troubled manner. Continuing like that for a few seconds, he eventually sighed.

“Well, I’m just trying to say that one can pass the time like that too, you know.”

Masazumi wondered about this and folded her arms as if trying to protect herself. After that, she tilted her neck.

“Yesterday he started some trouble in a restaurant on Tama’s surface when he covered one of Mitotsudaira’s business partners, who was completely naked, in cream and stuck an eel up his butt. That was quite the incident, don’t you think?”

“That did indeed happen, but you know...”

Sakai looked at Masazumi out of the corner of his eye and in response Masazumi pulled back a bit.

“...Did you know that what that gourmet really wanted was to court Nate in

order to take control of the Mitotsudaira family?”

“...Huh?”

“I don’t know if he was from Hexagone Française or the Far East, but he was trying to acquire a name inheritance and wanted to marry into the Mitotsudaira family. With that objective, he tried to approach her as a business partner. Nate sure is strong willed, but she’s also someone who thinks hard upon her position and family. I was even consulted about it, you know?”

That means... Masazumi twisted her eyebrows.

“That mess was President Sakai’s work?”

“Hey, hey, hey, hey, don’t suspect me. I didn’t do anything; someone among them noticed, that’s it... After all, Musashi is pretty small, right? It was probably a coincidence, but...”

“But?”

“But, emotionally, Nate thanks everyone for that.”

“— — —”

As if punctuating sound by sound, he introduced a new topic of conversation.

And suddenly, he once again looked at Masazumi out of the corner of his eye and opened his mouth while looking around the area.

“—Indeed, today really is strange. Has Masazumi-kun noticed it?”

•

“Strange? What are you talking about...”

Questioning in her response, Masazumi looked at their surroundings and the flow of cargo vehicles and people.

After a while, Masazumi tilted her head as if she was saying: “I don’t know.”

Sakai pointed towards the checkpoint visible in the distance, at the lines cargo vehicles awaiting their goods.

“—As you heard from Shirojiro, all the cargo vehicles are mostly empty. Masazumi-kun, do you understand what that means?”

“That’s...”

Surprised, Masazumi raised her voice.

“There is cargo heading aboard the Musashi but none coming out of it, right? In short, we barely have any purchasing orders from Mikawa... This is the first time that I’ve seen the Mikawa checkpoint from the Musashi-side, but it’s true that a year ago the other checkpoints were different, I think.”

“Indeed, normally there’s more cargo coming from our side; but this time, there’s nothing, strangely enough.”

Masazumi took one step forward and spoke to a frowning Sakai while turning back.

“...Is this the result of Mikawa progressing with the ‘clearing out’ policy? Or is this a consequence of the population dwindling due to the increasing phenomena, so that the goods aren’t really needed? But even so, the fact that it’s just sending goods to Musashi makes it feel like—”

Masazumi continued.

“—It feels as if we’re taking keepsakes of Mikawa before it dies, as it tries to isolate itself from the whole world, don’t you think?”

“Hey, hey, don’t say scary stuff. It’s just that Mikawa is under sanctions, so exchange isn’t allowed. They’re putting some distance between themselves and Musashi. But well...”

I don’t really know, thought Sakai as he nodded...

Suddenly a structure flew by, high above his head. Like a cloud, that large shape crossed the sky.

“That is...a ship?”

The ship’s shape they were looking up at was not alone, as almost directly above several ships were incoming. In the west, above the mountains, a noticeable colossal white ship traveled making a deep noise...

“That’s the K.P.A. Italia Jörmungandr-class galley ‘Regno Unito’, owned by the Pope-Chancellor Innocentius and escorted by a Tres España security fleet. So the head of the Catholics came all the way here, where the hand of the Mlasi’s

P.A. Oda can reach. He is here to negotiate the development of a new armament, right?”

“Yes,” Masazumi opened her mouth.

“It’s because P.A. Oda is concentrating on their attack on the Asai. Using that opening, he’s going to plead for the development of a new Logismoí Óplo, a type of divine weapon that represents a fragment of the world’s power balance; in other words city-destruction-class personal armaments. These armaments have the embodiment of the eight evil thoughts of humanity as a motif, and the original prototypes of the seven deadly sins and their users are called the ‘Eight Dragon Kings’.”

“You’re well informed, aren’t you? The eight evil thoughts...can you name them?”

“Judge,” Masazumi said. And then she nodded...

“Gastrimargia (Gluttony), Porneia (Lust), Phylargyria (Avarice), Lypē (Lamenting), Orgē (Wrath), Akedia (Dejection), Kenodoxia (Vainglory), and Hyperēphania (Pride)—In the sixth century, they were condensed to seven by Gregorius the First. Vainglory was included in Pride, Lamenting and Dejection were combined as Sloth and Phtonos (Envy) was added, becoming seven. Because of that...”

She let out a breath.

“The deadly sins of man are now said to be seven, but in the beginning they were the eight evil thoughts warned of by the Greek Evagrius in Egypt. So, the seven deadly sins in Latin are what we usually speak of in the present world. But originally...their prototypes were the Greek’s eight evil thoughts.”

•

Masazumi spoke starting to walk once again whilst scraping the dirt stuck to her zōri sandals on the dried road.

“And, was it ten years ago?”

In the middle of the shadow projected by the ships traveling in the sky, Masazumi remembered those days while looking at her feet.

“Right before the Musashi’s Grand Renovation, after concluding the talks to make the provisional alliance with P.A. Oda a formal alliance, Lord Motonobu sent the eight Logismoι Óplo to all the Testament countries with the exception of P.A. Oda. Those were...”

- Gastrimargia (Gluttony):** M.H.R.R. (Holy Roman Empire)
- Porneia (Lust):** K.P.A. Italia
- Phylargyria (Avarice):** England
- Lypē (Lamenting):** Tres España
- Orgē (Wrath):** Sviet Rus
- Akedia (Dejection):** Tres España
- Kenodoxia (Vainglory):** Hexagone Française
- Hyperēphania (Pride):** Hexagone Française

“Tres España and Hexagone Française possess two because their sins were combined when the eight evil thoughts became the seven deadly sins. Their outputs are set to low settings...but it seems that Tres España brought their weapons to the New World and drove the feral mechanical beasts to extinction. Going by the rumors, they created such a large-scale destruction just with a few kilounits of ether. Just in terms of pure power, these divine weapons are of the same rank as the Testamenta Arma that are based on the Testaments; and different from them in that while the Testamenta Arma are limited by doctrine, the Logismoι Óplo can be used without restrictions. This is due to these Deadly Sin Armaments being reprimanding weapons used to lay bare the sins of the opponent.”

Masazumi looked at the western sky, to the white-armored ship that was facing towards the continental port, the “Regno Unito”.

“The rumors say that the Pope came all the way here this time because he wants to get the ‘Phtonos’ in the seven deadly sins made. Currently, K.P.A. Italia have to hurry against the strengthening of Protestantism and the decline in the Middle-Eastern trade.”

She sighed.

“The Pope-Chancellor is also the wielder of one of the Logismoi Óplo, so he is one of the Eight Dragon Kings; but being the head of the Catholics he really hates that name... Even so, he wants a new Deadly Sin Armament as there are some problems even if K.P.A. Italia is making profits thanks to Lombardia’s international loans.”

“Basically, loans are forbidden under Catholicism so even though they are able to profit from them by the way of taxes, they have to be maintained by the unconventional races and the non-Testament regions where the monetary circulation is permitted; and more than anybody else, by the Far East’s lending businesses. Their regulations on money lending and borrowing are really strict, so we are like their mediator regarding loans and land mortgage. The Pope-Chancellor is really in a tight spot.”

Sakai, who said that, formed a drooping smile at the corner of his mouth.

“But well...”

“What is it?”

That instant, Masazumi relaxed her shoulders and took a step forward.

“Masazumi-kun... Do you know the rumors related to the Logismoi Óplo?”

“The rumors...?”

“Judge, judge, judge,” Sakai nodded three times. At that point, he stuck his index finger up and said this.

“—The rumors that the Logismoi Óplo are made from humans.”

•

At Sakai’s words, Masazumi slightly lost hold of herself.

The rumor that Sakai mentioned just now had been heard by Masazumi before. It went like this:

“To make weapons of the power of the deadly sins and the original sins of humanity, it is only appropriate to use humans as components...”

“Right, right, and also something like ‘the reason why the people have disappeared from Nagoya is actually because they have been used as the

components of the Logismoí Óplo.’ ”

“Th-there’s nothing like that.”

Masazumi recalled her memories of living in Mikawa.

“It’d be a problem if it wasn’t just a rumor. When I was still there, the citizens would usually give proper notice before leaving if they were changing their residence. If their whereabouts became unknown just like that, like in recent phenomena, there would be an uproar.”

“Is that so?” said Sakai while he continued to look up at the sky.

“Do you think that the things related to this will end being a rumor, Masazumi-kun?”

“—Eh?”

Sakai spoke and looking at her he formed a broad smile at the edges of his mouth.

“I...just thought that it would be interesting if Masazumi-kun also came over to this side.”

“By saying ‘this side’ you mean...”

“The side where we would be able to calmly talk about things like my past.”

The past, that is...

“For example, the reason why I was demoted to Musashi... How I, following the Testament description, allowed the person who was supposed to be the heir of my lord to commit suicide. The side where you would be able to bring those words to your lips with a smile.”

“——”

I know about what Sakai was talking about, the reason of his demotion. It’s something any citizen of Mikawa would know: How even though it was by the Testament’s description, one of the Four Heavenly Kings let the heir of his lord commit suicide.

There was a time when the leader of Mikawa, Lord Motonobu, had no wife and no heir.

...Therefore, Lord Motonobu let his little brother inherit the name of his heir.

Matsudaira Nobuyasu.

According to the Testament's descriptions, he had committed suicide due to some trouble with the Oda family.

Was that also the reason? Around fifteen years ago, there was still no inheritor for Nobunaga's name in P.A. Oda, so Mikawa refused an alliance and tried to overcome said Testament's description using a 'broad interpretation' of it, but...

...As P.A. Oda encircled them, a provisional alliance was formed under a bit of coercion.

Subjected to those circumstances, and as proof of loyalty, the Lord's younger brother was forced to commit suicide after he became the heir.

Sakai, who was supposed to be the guardian of the Lord's younger brother, was demoted since he was unable to stop the suicide.

The rumors said that Lord Nobuyasu wished for his own death and when Sakai ran to stop him, it was too late.

That was the reason that Masazumi knew for Sakai's demotion.

...However.

I can't simply bring those words to my lips, am I really that naive?

Inside her field of vision and without erasing that smile at the edge of his mouth, Sakai said:

"So, Masazumi-kun; as you seem to be thinking a lot, what would you think if that story had a continuation?"

"...Eh? A continuation?"

"Judge, judge," Sakai said twice.

"What if Lord Motonobu actually...had an illegitimate wife and had a child with her?"

"__"

Masazumi lost all words for an instant. She forced herself to open her mouth. As she was not able to grasp what she had just been told and felt like her mind was still not stabilized, she asked something to confirm whether this was truth or fiction.

“No way. If that kind of child existed...”

That would mean that as the Lord’s younger brother who had inherited his heir’s name had committed suicide, that child would become the new heir, right? However...

“But where is that child and what is he doing...? Why doesn’t he come out into the open?”

“That’s why I said that earlier, didn’t I?”

Sakai spoke.

“If you want to know, step inside and come to this side, Masazumi-kun... Your wish is to be a politician and you seem to be thinking on the grand scale of things; but you are failing at stepping inside, don’t you think?”

“But,” Sakai added.

“I like being bullied, you know... So, why won’t you step in with me?”

Speaking these words, Sakai suddenly sped up his gait.

The wind moved, the sound of clothes rustling resounded. As if being surreptitiously held by Sakai, the tantō at the back of his waist shook.

“—Well, let’s end this conversation at that...shall we?”

Masazumi chased Sakai with her gaze as he headed towards the open area of the checkpoint and was passed by a single horse-drawn carriage. Masazumi, a little panicked, moved her feet in order to catch up to him; and accompanied by the sound of her footsteps she reached the wide clearing.

“...Oh.”

The sound of the received goods being delivered, the murmurs of people, the sound of cargo vehicles moving and the unobstructed sunlight drowned Masazumi’s body. The two traveled the footpath designated by a rope as being

under pedestrian priority.

“Well then, Masazumi-kun. Once we get all the documents proving that you have delivered me you can return and have some fun.”

“Okay. Also, President Sakai, as you are one of the Four Heavenly Kings of the Matsudaira you probably know it; but Lord Tadakatsu’s daughter and I were in the same grade in the past, so if you meet with her send her my regards.”

“Ahh, she was... Will she come today? Well, if I meet her I’ll speak to her.”

After saying “thank you very much,” Masazumi thought about what Sakai had told her just now about “stepping inside”. Something similar to that was also said to her today by another person. Therefore...

“There’s something I want to investigate today, so I’ll be focusing into that.”

“Hmm, what is it?”

“The ‘Remorse Way’. I was told that if I investigate it, I’ll understand everyone.”

Masazumi nodded in her heart. *This has to be one step inside*, she thought.

When she said that, Sakai had a single reaction before her eyes.

He laughed.

...Eh?

Masazumi lost all her words against that sudden laughing and Sakai smiled to her to bid his farewell.

“That’s pretty good. As everyone is getting ready for Toori’s confession tomorrow, all of them are probably preparing for the celebration or something given that they are going to hold a party at the Academy tonight. Also, from today onwards the crown prince Azuma-kun has thrown away his position and powers and restarted his life at Musashi. And lastly, there is going to be a festival and fireworks under the instructions of the Lord Teacher. All of it seems unconnected...but they are all new activities, and celebrations too.”

After a single breath, Sakai continued his words.

“It would be nice if learning about the ‘Remorse Way’ could be your new

activity, Masazumi-kun.”

He let out another breath.

“There is a lot of stuff that I don’t know about, but I hope that Masazumi-kun ends up being at Toori’s side along with all the people now with him.”

Chapter 09: The One Waiting Beyond the Door

CHAPTER 9

"The One Waiting Beyond the Door"



When I had thought that it was ^{nobody exists} **nobody**.

That was not it.

It was not ^{no need for somebody} **no body** either.

Then, what was it.

Point Allocation (At the point of death)

When I had thought that it was ^{nobody exists} **nobody**

That was not it

It was not ^{no need for somebody} **no body** either Then, what was it

Point Allocation (At the point of death)

•

There was an underground hallway. It was an illuminated underground passage in the residential areas.

In the corner, a single boy with his shoulders drooping was standing in front of a western-style sliding door.

It was Azuma.

Without even paying attention to his messy hair, he stood there lost in thought.

In the end, I came back here... But I really failed...

I was planning on resolving the situation where there was already a previous resident in the room that would be my new one, but...

...What kind of wild goose chase was I subjected to?

First, I went to the office that manages the rooms. The manager's office was at the entrance to a vertical passage at the end of the horizontal sections.

But at the office I discovered that they weren't the ones managing the paperwork needed for me to move, even though they were supposed to be the ones in charge of the residences; so I was told that I had to bring my residency change documents from the Academy if I wanted to change my room.

At least at that office I was able to confirm who the resident in my room was.

Miriam Poqou, 18 years old. She was in the same class as me. The manager, who was an aged werewolf, looked into it and burst into laughter.

"Isn't that fine?! Are appearances really that important among the young?!" he asked.

"If that's the case, then as expected, this won't do." I thought. I had largely

completed my transition into a secular life yesterday; but living together with a girl from my class right as I become a citizen after being a member of the imperial family is too big a character change.

...And more than that, the other side of this equation is troubling.

However, when I went to the Academy's business office in an attempt to acquire my residence change documents I was told: "You need the permission of your guardian..."

After that, as it was really important, I was stuck searching for Oriotorai. It seems she wasn't carrying the paperwork I needed and it wasn't in the teachers' staff room either, so I had to look for it around the school. In the classroom being used by the tea ceremony club was an acquaintance of mine, Asama, who along with the other club members was performing the tea ceremony with sport drinks for the athletics club. At that time Asama had a hat pierced with arrows placed to one side, while drinking the IZUMO-brand lemon-flavored sports drink "CC-EMON" and kneeling. I was able to explain my case to her, but she said: "Isn't that fine? Are appearances really that important among the young?"

In short, all that happened was that I learned that this girl was also something else.

However, according to their information Oriotorai had the habit of "inspecting her territory" around that time, so with everyone's cooperation I found Oriotorai in the cafeteria two hours later.

As I was trying to head to the cafeteria, I heard laughter and saw an amazing woman who had been getting smashed on the local brand sake since noon there.

I didn't really understand it, but a recklessly cheerful Oriotorai told me: "Ain't that fine!? Are appearances really that important among you young'uns?"

...Could it be that all the residents of Musashi have been brainwashed in such a way that their thought patterns have been completely standardized?

And after talking about a lot of things for what was likely a whole hour...

I've been utterly defeated...

In other words, Azuma was now in front of that room thinking from the bottom of his heart that this was bad.

Being defeated meant that I can do nothing but stay in this room. But doing so and staying in this room will probably affect my image, given my youth. Meaning that I can't, so I will live outside. There should be some place sheltered from the wind and rain even there, right? But isn't becoming homeless immediately after my return to secular life too big a character change as well?

...Could it be that now, I^[11] am in the midst of running away from reality?

While he was thinking, a girl's voice could be heard from the other side of the sliding door before his eyes.

"What are you doing? You can come in, it's fine."

...Eh?

At that question, he panicked and glanced around at his surroundings. School was over and the sun was starting to set, so the students in the clubs were going to their respective activity areas; and all the people in the hallways were on their way to wash their laundry or clean their rooms. Which meant...

"It is...fine?"

After that question, there was a pause.

In that empty space of time, he took a breath, then a second one; and when he was in the middle of the third...

...Huh? Did I say something wrong?

Thinking of that question, he started sweating profusely. Then she said: "—I don't really understand what you mean, but I guess it's fine even if you don't come in."

"Ah, no."

So naturally, his hand reached out to the sliding door. While he was wondering if this really was fine, he felt that not entering would be even worse; so therefore, Azuma opened the door by sliding it to the left.

"Um."

Faster than he was able to get a clear look at the figure of the girl seated in the wheelchair in front of him, she said this: “—I want to talk with you a little. Is that fine with you, Azuma?”

•

Azuma did not close the sliding door.

He didn’t want to give the feeling that he was going to stay by closing the door; but...

“Please close it. This is a room with a girl inside, you know.”

As she had said, he decided to close the door. He closed it, hands behind his back, in such a way that he would make the least amount of noise possible.

Directly in front of him, the girl called Miriam Poqou continued to face her wheelchair towards the desk and looked his way by just turning her head.

And then...

What should I say? No, I should start with my question.

“I was told that I would stay in this room from today onwards by the Academy —”

“That’s fine.”

His words were cut off. Miriam looked as if she was thinking a little, but...

“It’s something that happens all the time. Generally everyone involved gets perplexed, but you’ll get used to it.”

“Get used to it...”

“This isn’t the first time I’ve shared a room... It’s the first time with a boy, though.”

“I-if that’s so—”

“It’ll be fine once we get used to it; that applies for the both of us. There’ve already been a lot of cases where boys and girls are assigned to the same room. I think that’s just what happened this time... Also, if this room was assigned to you, then it’s yours as much as mine.

“Even so, asking whether it’s fine for yourself to be here is the same thing as asking me whether you should leave, you know? I don’t want to leave, so it’s fine if you stay as well.”

And...

“Use the space in front of you as you please and the corner will be mine. Also, I want to use the bottom bunk; is that fine?”

Azuma could not answer the question, as he was currently in a state where he had lost all words.

...Doesn’t she think it’s a problem?

She said, “It’s something that happens all the time.” *The girl who lives her life in a wheelchair. The “all the time” she’s talking about is different from my “all the time”.* While he thought about the meaning of that, Miriam tilted her head.

“...Well, whether it has some thought behind it or it’s a mistake, it’s something the Academy decided upon, right? It’s something that happens all the time. I think that I’ll be able to get used to it, but is it fine with you? Staying in the same room as me.”

“With me?”

He said himself and came to a realization. *Is this about the distance between boys and girls?* As such, Azuma returned a question with the same words.

“Is it really fine with you to share a room with a boy?”

“...Umm, you don’t really understand what I’m saying, do you—? Well, whatever. You know, Azuma, if you really think that it’s wrong for boys and girls to live together, why are you standing there?”

Miriam’s voice could be heard.

“I’ve already done things like showed parts of my body to doctors, you know. And there’s no distinction between doctors and male students in that if something goes wrong in that situation, it’ll be a crime. But I don’t think you’re that kind of person.”

“Why—”

“You know,” Miriam said.

“I basically understand what you did after you left earlier. You understand the implications of boys and girls being in the same room, so you went to object; and you were argued with because you’re too nice. You’re honest to the extent where you couldn’t even decide that ‘it’s fine if she understands’; so you were standing in front of the door, right?”

“Isn’t it fine? If you understand just that one thing, I know that when both of us get rid of this nervousness, it’ll be over and done with. That’s why...first I’d like for you to make a promise with me; is that OK?”

“A promise?”

“Yes...to not raise a word against each others’ lives. For example, I’m an overly religious Catholic but you’re a Shintoist, right? Things like that and... that’s right, if we were to talk about the extremes, I wouldn’t say anything even if you brought a girl here.”

“I-I won’t do anything like that.”

“My, ‘won’t’ means that it’s something that you ‘could’ do but won’t, doesn’t it?”

Spoken to thus, Azuma felt that heat was rising to his cheeks. Words like “No” or “Um” leaked from his mouth, but in response, Miriam suddenly relaxed her eyes, and with a small laugh she waved her hand.

“I’m sorry, I was joking. That was my bad, I know that you’re serious.”

“Is that why you made fun of me?”

“Not that. I wanted to confirm whether you were even more serious than I thought. It was unnecessary; I apologize.”

“You know,” Miriam said again.

“Fundamentally, the fact that I take classes through the notes that everyone brings to me means I’m treated the same as taking lessons from home. And I’ll choose times when the bath and canteen are empty, so if you’re interrupted by my life, you won’t have to do anything. I move at different times from everyone else.”

“Sh-should I help you?”

“Eh?”

Her eyes opened, and being asked in question, Azuma realized that he had said those words out of reflex.

Therefore, while feeling panic in his heart...

“I mean, things like helping you move in your wheelchair...”

The sound of his voice faded, as he strongly felt that he was saying something unnecessary.

In response, Miriam closed her opened eyes in a relaxed manner and narrowed them, smiling wryly.

“That’s not why you were sent here to share a room, was it?”

After he was remonstrated, Miriam looked around the room...

“Is it fine? Being treated the same as anyone else, assuming that wasn’t a mistake or a misunderstanding... That it means you’ll be trusted by me, you know? Looking from your viewpoint, this is probably because there was indeed some sort of mistake or misunderstanding; but from my point of view, it’d be nice if the guilt stemming from this room being underused was gone. That I’m being treated as a human being is also something I’m grateful of.”

At her words, Azuma felt something hard around his throat.

...As a human being...huh?

The equivalence that the girl in the wheelchair hopes for.

...That is, to welcome the new resident of her room just like anyone else...

That what everyone else is doing, she can do too. She is saying that she is thankful for such a normal thing.

“__”

Azuma thought of himself. His power sealed, he had returned to a normal life and started to live as a normal person; but...

...He hadn’t even considered that this was something to be thankful for.

It wasn't something he had needed to think of, because his and Miriam's viewpoints were different. However, this crossed Azuma's mind: *Her daily life and mine hold different weights for each of us.*

And now, Miriam was telling him to not care about her legs.

She was saying that it was even fine to live together with a boy if she got used to it. Even saying that this had happened before.

She also has a certain stubbornness to her, Azuma thought. To not make others feel concerned for her, she tries to be normal; and there were a lot of times where she would just say "It's alright." Therefore...

"Then, I want you to make a promise with me too."

"...What? What promise can I make to you?"

Azuma spoke to the girl, who was frowning slightly and tilting her head. After giving a single gesture...

"—If the other looks troubled, I hope that it will be allowed to at least ask about it."

"...You won't suddenly make a move?"

He nodded, and Miriam showed a smile where the corners of her eyes dropped.

"You are serious, aren't you?"

With the same expression, Miriam shook her head up and down.

However, when she raised her face she had already changed her expression to its regular smile...

"But if asking questions is allowed, then can I ask a single question right now? ...You know, why have you been shaking the entire time we have been talking?"

"—Eh? No, um."

"Would it have been better if I were a cute and quiet girl?"

No matter what he answered, it seemed as if it would be an insult; but denying that would be a lie without a doubt. Therefore, Azuma said...

“That’s unfair...it feels like you have been testing me the whole time.”

“Is that so? Even if I’m the one to give you points as score, you’re the one the only one who can earn them, you know?”

“...? Why is it that girls can’t earn points?”

“That is because a girl’s points are determined by...the points of the boy she’s with.”

“Huh?” Azuma faltered. In front of him, Miriam was laughing softly while waving the palm of her hand.

“Isn’t that right? No matter how much one is dressed up, if it’s only that then it’s just a hobby. If you dress up while being aware of what people see, then you’re expressing yourself. Because of this, it’s fashionable if you are able to dress up in such a way that people are captivated. And if you are able to dress up such a way that you can steal the eyes of a person who holds the points that you want...”

Widening her smile, she looked up from drooping her head...

“...that’s what it means to reach out to the one you yearn for.”

Saying that, Miriam looked his way. She left a smile at the edge of her lips...

“What kind of person are you? An honest person, a soft-hearted person unable to throw away your earnestness...”

“Le-let’s stop with all this points business.”

“—You’re rather conceited, so I got a little ahead of myself, didn’t I?”

He was laughed at. *But, that really is true*, he thought...

...Am I earnest?

That’s a bad point, he also thought.

And looking at Miriam, who wiped away the tears at the corners of her eyes that came about from laughing, Azuma thought this: *...It’s fine.*

Marking the lines of each others’ spaces, without interfering in each others’ lives, asking whenever we take interest in something. In short, this is...

“Good enough for two strangers, isn’t it.”

“If you say ‘let’s start as strangers,’ that’ll be the time I say, ‘That’s it, get out,’ you know?”

“Ahh, then...now, I guess that sets my score.”

So he said, and Miriam raised her eyebrows. For about a breath she looked his way with an expression that was not quite a smile nor surprise; but suddenly she bent her body forward, burst out laughing, and formed words.

“—If you hadn’t said that you’d have rather high points. You are so foolishly earnest.”

“But,” saying that, Miriam stuck her left hand out his way. Lightly opening her hand for a handshake...

“—I can’t be suspicious of foolishly earnest people.”

•

The checkpoint at the foot of Kakamigahara had a bridge.

It was a checkpoint different from the quarantine and trade checkpoint at the upper side of the mountain. To be sure that things that descended from the mountain would be unable to immediately enter Mikawa, it was a place whose purpose was a second inspection.

The gate that was proof of the checkpoint was built on the riverbank of the river running down the mountain, in front of a bridge.

The wide, roofless gate was open; and from the opened gate, a bridge around 10 meters in width was visible.

And south from the bridge, if one looked at the sea, on the other side of the wide fields and forests, at the foot of the gentle slope, was a village stained with blue.

In the center of the village, the flat New Nagoya Castle laid, as if covered by brown cloth.

Before this backdrop, there were three figures.

One was a past middling, slender man.

One was a full-figured man, around the same age.

And the other was a girl sticking close to the back of the second.

The three were standing with the village of Mikawa to their backs.

To that place, another figure came. He too was a past-middling, hunchbacked man...

“Oh, to think that two of the Matsudaira Four Heavenly Kings, Sakakibara Yasumasa and Honda Tadakatsu would come to greet me... Was this to not disappoint me? Where’s li? Sakakibara, Da-chan.”

At his words, the middling, slender man called Sakakibara raised his face slightly. He brushed his white hair aside...

“About that, Sakai-kun, actually, li-kun has—”

“Don’t say a word about li. Have you forgotten, Sakakibara?”

The middling, full-figured man called Tadakatsu spoke without turning his gaze to Sakakibara.

Sakakibara, beside him, let his lips falter; but looking in Sakai’s direction he shut his mouth together with a nod.

As if a substitute, Tadakatsu stepped forwards half a step. Tilting his body forward a little...

“—Show me.”

In an instant, the figure of the girl at Tadakatsu’s back disappeared.

In response, Sakai raised his face slightly...

“Huh? Heyheyhey, the ‘show me’ you’re talking about isn’t about something good is i—”

Before his line was over, a figure that outlined two arcs approached Sakai’s back.

One of the arcs was the trajectory that the tied hair of the girl from just now had traced.

The other arc was a silver trajectory that told of a drawn blade.

The movement did not stop. And as such...

“—!”

Sakai also put his body into motion.

Chapter 10: Commandos in Town

CHAPTER 10

"Commandos in Town"



Our everyday passes by.

Time passes by.

Destiny passes by.

What is it that does not pass.

Point Allocation (Human Relationships)

Our everyday passes by

Time passes by

Destiny passes by

What is it that does not pass

Point Allocation (Human Relationships)

•

Sakai's mind connected the dots within an instant.

Just from the flow of wind behind him, he understood that the girl from just now had arrived.

With no hesitation in his movements, he turned and confirmed it.

...Her style is that of a Strike Forcer (Close-combat martial artist)!? This is pretty serious, but she is...

There was a vague memory. Ten years ago, he had indeed met this girl.

Honda Tadakatsu's daughter. The girl whom Masazumi had said was her acquaintance.

What was her name? I don't remember, but...

...Her movements are as sharp as ever! But she always used to carry a spear...!

I don't understand what's happening; having suddenly twisted around to my back, is she attacking or protecting me?

And now, the movements he felt against his skin were the vibrations of the air that the girl had caused by twisting her body.

The vibration was large, the initial speed slow.

Then it's an attack, Sakai judged. If she was stretching her arms for the sake of protection, then the vibration would be small and the initial speed fast. However, because the wind raised during an attack is caused by the wielder carrying his own volume, and is for the sake of making a complete swing, at first it's slow but the movement is large.

Now, it's the latter.

How will she approach me? That was not a question formed by Sakai's thoughts, but by his instinct.

I remember this girl's weapon. When she was standing behind Tadakatsu, I was looking at it.

It was not that I became aware of it and was looking at it. The experience of the battles I had cut my way through as a former member of the Matsudaira Four Heavenly Kings sits deeper than in my consciousness. That weapon is of the Shirasago Industries brand. The wooden handle, having been covered with a black matte finish, was of a color that contrasts with the brand name^[12] and is sold as something with a durable structure.

The hilt was straight, and because of its length it looked as if it was made to compensate for the instability that stemmed from its lightness.

...If so.

Even though the long hilt is aimed towards easy handling of the blade, it holds a single problem.

A katana is a weapon that slices by touching the opponent and retracting as if shaving a piece off. However that denotes the reality in which the wielder has to cut by pulling the blade that has touched its victim towards their own chest.

As such, the blade of a katana cannot cut at any distance but a distance where it is able to be retracted. By putting some strength in the slicing, it is possible to slice deeply; but the distance that can be cut is the distance it can be retracted.

And if it's a katana that has a long hilt, when it's pulled towards one's front, the hilt will touch one's body.

The distance that it can be retracted is short.

In that case, what will the wielder do to make a long cut?

...They will drop their body and swing the blade far!

Dropping their entire body, they will extend their blade far to the front and pull with their entire body.

If that is done, they will be able to gain the twist of their body as a distance to retract the blade.

Now, the wind I feel behind my back is large.

A wind for the sake of stepping her entire body in with all her strength.

The target is the right side of my abdomen. A horizontal slice from my back.

She's good, Sakai's instinct acknowledged his opponent.

If she aimed for my upper body, the thick muscle and bone of my shoulder and chest would interrupt her. If it's below the stomach, she'll end up severing or snapping my wrist but she can split the thin flesh of the side-abdomen that stretches with the pressure of the stomach.

Furthermore, if it's a horizontal slash, then she can pull the blade horizontally.

If she does so, then she will automatically pull the blade with just a turning movement of her body and the retracted pommel won't touch her chest or stomach. If she chains with a twisting motion inwards, she doesn't even need to steady her footing.

It's a terrifying sword technique, which shows in how it's regulated. It's not something that is learned on the practice ground. This is a sword technique from true battle.

What should I do to avoid it?

Faster than he thought, Sakai moved.

•

Sakai moved in a way that could not be called an evasion.

In response to the whirling blow behind him, he...

"This."

...lightly took one step back.

"—!"

The slice that came after the stepping back approached nonetheless.

If it's a weapon that slices, by leaping in from this direction I'm able to make the distance to retract zero. Even if the opponent stepped backwards, it would become a distance shorter than the original one she was able to pull.

The question is, am I able to step back faster than the slice from the horizontal slash?

Therefore, I twisted my body. Not just directly to the rear, but towards my left as well.

I went.

And furthermore...

“And then—”

Sakai half-drew the tantō he was concealing at the back of his waist.

The draw method is a right backhand, a movement where I pull my shoulder up along with my arm. Because of this, I’m able to protect my right waist with the tantō’s blade, and I can protect my right chest with my slanted arm. Even further, I protect the right part of my neck with my raised shoulder.

By doing this, I respond to the opponent’s slice, take a good position, and defend.

Having played his best card, Sakai suddenly twisted his body, having leaped towards his posterior-left, to the right.

The opponent who swung the blade should be there.

She was there.

Black hair was visible.

Now, I touch her body; and from the next instant onwards, the initiative is in my hands.

Generally this would be the time to insert a blow, make her obedient, and show her our difference in form; but now I am the student president of an Academy. I can’t really do anything horrible to a young girl. But to speculate, I think that groping breasts would still be allowed.

And the opponent’s blade tried to hit my blade.

However...

“...h!?”

Sakai saw that the girl behind him suddenly moved to his anterior-right.

...This is—

The place the girl was standing was directly in front of my right shoulder. She was showing me her back. She seemed to have dropped her hip.

I don't know what's happening.

I don't know, but it's a fact that there was an instantaneous movement.

And I know the reason for her having moved to the right and front of me.

...So that her own blade wouldn't clash with mine, huh!?

Blades are made of metal. Even if it's polymerized to increase its durability, even if it's tempered, if it hits something hard it will bend or even break. If one is a master, one can sever metal with a blade without spells or blessings; but that wasn't an easy thing to do even for Sakai while he was in service.

As such, the girl avoided the clashing of blades.

Evading, bursting forward, she controlled her body and twisted for the sake of her slice by dropping her hip.

The katana, readied to the left as if shouldered, matched with the movement of her standing up and leaped upwards...

“—”

It approached.

Swinging a blade upwards from a bent position, and biting into my neck from the bottom right with that movement. An irregular cut.

Sakai's right arm, the hand holding the tantō, was suppressed by her back.

...She's good.

Reading my movements, she always aims for a fatal blow. That she's not afraid of close contact with her opponent is the result of her training.

Sakai tried to evade before the blade leaped up to meet him...

“No.”

The tip of his right foot was stepped upon by her deeply retracted left heel.

I drew back my toes. But it was too slow. On the contrary, my attention was taken by the act of withdrawing my toes.



Honda Futayo

I cannot dodge. And before my eyes, the girl showed the initial movements of swinging the blade.

This is bad. But when I looked at the two former colleagues in front of me...

...Those bastards, what are they clenching their fists and watching the battle for...!

If I could make them speak, I could not come up with anything but the “Go—!” apparent in their faces.

While thinking *I’ll knock them down afterward*, Sakai moved.

Now, he could not draw his tantō. Therefore, Sakai made an instantaneous decision. An instinctive movement. That was...

“Slap.”

Sakai released his tantō, stuck that hand between the girl’s back and blade, and touched her left butt cheek.

He held her left butt cheek with his hand that had come free. And...

“—!?”

From the girl’s mouth, a scream with a tint of surprise was released.

•

“Yes, so, have you just about gathered everything? The ingredients for the food for the celebration tomorrow?”

The three figures following Asama, who was dressed in shrine maiden garments, nodded at her words.

The location was a commercial street in the starboard section of the surface segment of the second starboard ship, Tama. Having the benefit of being a ship aimed towards sightseers, it was an attractive place. Among the people who were walking back and forth, there were those who had come up from Mikawa and the students of K.P.A. Italia and Tres España who had come from the southern continental port.

While one of the four who were standing in the midst of that, Naomasa, was spinning and fiddling around with the large wrench used for ship-interior

maintenance with her prosthetic arm, she looked at the other three: Adele, Suzu and Asama.

“I know there’s going to be a lot of people, but didn’t we buy too much in one go?”

What Naomasa’s words indicated was the mountain of paper bags that everyone was holding. Let alone those in the arms of the four, bags were hanging at their elbows and some were even suspended on the hard points of their waists.

“I-if Ga-Ga-chan and Go-chan...came, it would have been nice, but...”

Suzu, comparatively slight and light, shook the object-oriented hanging sensors at the side of her waist as she adjusted her hold on the burden she was clutching and spoke. That done, Asama replied...

“Naito and Naruze, those two, are doing some transportation work. I think that they are flying around between the ships right now, but earlier we should have asked them in advance when Toori was blown away by Mito.”

At Asama’s words, the girl with glasses, Adele, sighed with a “Haaah.”

“Well, thanks for your work too, Asama-san. Seeing as how you’re in shrine maiden garments, work at the Asama Shrine is pretty busy now, isn’t it?”

“Yes. At the end of spring, there’s a lot of contract-related work and I’m really busy with counter operations... As for spells, everyone seems to want overpowered ones; so the amount of our monthly orders are getting huge.”

“Doesn’t everyone think that they can get overpowered ones if they go to your shrine?”

Naomasa spun the wrench, and while flipping it over her shoulder from her side, she spoke.

“Didn’t you join the archery club’s human target practice at the culture festival last year, and completely took out everyone including the club members desperately trying to escape the range? And then you took all the prizes and gave them to the orphanage. Even the orphans thought that the presents were the products of human sacrifice, right? The lives of people mean less than

prizes, huh.”

“Masa, I mean, something like shooting a group of people not even including acceleration-types is easier than shooting sitting ducks, so I couldn’t help it, could I? Besides, screaming and trying to run outside would have really have caused a disturbance to the people outside the range, so I just blew them away.”

“...Please, try to understand the word ‘disturbance’.”

“Hmm?” In response to Asama, who tilted her head, Naomasa gave the wrench on her shoulder a glance.

“Anyway, joining us like this, you’ll be coming to the ‘ghost hunt’ today, right? I’ve also gotten a night shift off from the chief, Taizou-jii-san, but—”

Naomasa indicated towards Asakusa with her chin. The cargo ships Asakusa and Shinagawa had lowered the sails from their masts, their total heights above 100 meters, and were opening up the derricks that used the left and right arms of the masts. Pulling the ropes going through the pulley on the tip of the arms, the suspended derricks utilized the labor-use gods of war, aerial races, and workers to pull the ropes and manage the movements of the upper segment.

“Well, there’s that, but if I’m going to have the time to help working on Jizuri Suzaku, I’m going to have to head off now.”

As she was speaking she pulled a rope, and the god of war suspended above the derrick descended towards her. Adele, who saw that, formed her eyes into bow-shapes...

“Occasionally, let’s use it as a gondola or play with it like a swing. Wouldn’t that be nice?”

“Just by the way, that’s work research too. Anyway...the sky has become really noisy, hasn’t it.”

In the sky between Asakusa and Shinagawa, between every ship, there were numerous figures that had started to soar the sky with white mist trailing after them. They were aerial races and Technohexen. While taking trajectories that seemed to intertwine at high speed, each of them traversed between the ships; but...

“The supervision of Tres España’s gods of war has ended, so the delivery workers have started to race and have mock battles. Naruze said that there are a lot of people from all over who were aces in their countries but couldn’t compromise with their religions that have fled here; because of that, the exchange of techniques and knowledge is world-class here.”

“Ah, Naruze and Naito were also flying around just now, you know? At a speed where they would have been invisible if not for ‘Konoha’ ...According to them, their two-man unit is top class.”

“Well, those two are also doing their work and things like that at the moment; and they’re going to gather at the Academy at night. Really, there’s nobody around me who’s up to any good.”

“...Masa, please look in a mirror and say that last line again.”

At Asama’s words, Adele laughed softly. She placed the paper bags and packages on her raised knee and adjusted her grasp...

“But well, there’s also Mikawa’s fireworks, though as expected everyone’s going to see the chancellor, huh... I’m also going to join battle with a mock-use support lance with an anti-ghost spell, though.”

“I-I’m al-also going.”

Suzu also spoke, and nodded. Asama, who was looking at everyone with her two-colored eyes, lowered the corners of her eyebrows and laughed.

“What is this, everyone’s interested in Toori-kun, aren’t they?”

“That’s true. The entire world is noisy with Oda and the Logismoí Óplo and the End of Days, but worrying about whether an idiot’s confession will pass through or not is really like, well, not the Song of Passage, but...” [13]

Naomasa, shouldering the wrench behind her neck, looked up at the mid-afternoon sky and spoke.

“ ‘Despite my fear^[14],’ huh. ...That idiot has really gotten motivated.”

Naomasa, lowering her gaze, looked at Asama and opened her mouth. The words that came out were:

“Along with Kimi, you have been with him longer than any of us, haven’t you?”

•

After Asama, who had been questioned by Naomasa, had thought for a little while, she nodded. Looking at everyone...

“Well, even if you say ‘longer’, it’s because of the relationship between our parents; and my memories from when we were young are rather vague.”

“But, only you have been together with him since before elementary school. Everyone else came after elementary school. So everyone, well, knows what kind of person Toori is, but—”

“Ma-Masazumi-san is di-diffe-rent. And al-also, A-Azuma-san.”

Asama nodded in response to Suzu’s words.

“That’s because Masazumi transferred here last year... Even today, she didn’t come to the Academy and just set off towards Mikawa with the school president... She’s different from us, since she seems to treat the Academy as just a waypoint of her life.”

And also...

“Azuma-kun entered after middle school, so I don’t think that he completely understands Toori-kun.”

“But,” Asama tilted her head. Looking at Naomasa...

“Why do you ask?”

At the question, Naomasa smiled wryly.

“—We, who are here, know about Horizon just as Toori does.”

At those words, Asama fell silent along with everybody. *What should I say, and how should I say it?* they all thought.

Even Naomasa, who had spoken, shut her mouth lightly; but after a while, she said...

“Shall we continue walking?”

Naomasa pointed at the road with her chin. That too was while she was lightly playing around with her wrench like it was a pendulum.

However, while passing people by, the road she was walking was...

“Um, th-the end of this path is...”

She knows. The reason Suzu is shaking her head is...

“Ahh, the snack shop that Toori always comes to in the morning is here, huh. But don’t worry, at this time the person Suzu fears has gone out... She’s doing her afternoon grave visit. You should know.”

At Naomasa’s line, Asama felt surprise in her heart. Taking a step as if following Naomasa, who had started walking...

“I’m a little surprised. That Masa would be interested in her.”

“—You and I both know about her visiting the graves. When I take a break in the outer hull’s emergency level after my morning or afternoon work, I can hear it most of the time, you know. That song.”

“By ‘that song’...”

“You know about it, right?” said Masa, who had already gone to the front of everyone and started walking...

“The Song of Passage. The song that we sang when we played together with Horizon. Outlining formations on the road with rocks, everyone would pass under each other’s arms...whoever was left in the middle of the formation when we finished singing was the loser.”

“Horizon had this strange part of her that would be concerned about all of us, and occasionally she would purposely lose because of it. She thought that nobody found out, but everyone knew...”

After a while, Asama, who had spoken, noticed that everyone walking was looking at her...

At this point, Asama understood the intent of Naomasa’s words just now. The reason she had been asked about the length of her companionship was...

...They’re telling me to talk about old memories of Horizon, aren’t they.

Horizon.

What remained in her memories was a black-haired, blue-eyed girl. The lines of her body were slender, but if she thinks back upon it now, there were times when Asama had thought that she was a girl with a strong heart, a heart too gentle. However, that too...

“Due to her birth she was a really troubled person... Toori-kun, by her side, was gradually becoming an idiot. As if that wasn’t enough, her birth would eventually cause extremely severe problems. Well, I got to know about that...”

A breath.

“...only after she died.”

Asama saw that everyone dropped their heads at those words. But Asama was the only one not to bow her own head...

“I wonder what Toori-kun thinks. Is the confession this time the beginning of his atonement, is it a continuation, or could it be a change in his state of mind... I really wonder what he thinks.”

“At the least...isn’t the fact that he’s going to fondle some boobs certain?”

“Y-yes, I wouldn’t say such bitter, realistic words at such a serious time.”

However, even while saying that to Adele, Asama could not stop her own shoulders from sagging. There was a trace of pitifulness within herself, thinking: *It really was like that; it really was, wasn’t it.* But Adele continued her words...

“Now that you mention it Asama-san, given that the chancellor was making some references, have you been fondled by the chancellor before? As far as I know, I can’t recall that happening, but...”

This sure was one can of worms. Asama panicked, and while shaking her head...

“No, um, I...”

“Ah? You don’t remember, do you Adele? When Asama-chi first wore a bra, a ‘That’s cheating! Dirty! A breast cover!?’ burst out from Toori, and he started doing it slowly from behind.”

“Uwaaaa—! What are you saying, Masa—!”

“Hahahahaha!” Naomasa laughed five times, and patted Asama’s shoulder with the palm of her hand.

“It’s fine, just laugh...right? Adele, she seriously started to cry, and Toori was scolded by Sensei; but afterward, Toori responded by saying: ‘Alright, then fondle my breasts and things will even out!!’ grabbed her hand, and made her fondle his own bosom while she was still crying, saying ‘Isn’t that nice!? ISN’T THIS GOOD!?’ and was scolded by Sensei a second time.”

“...Ahh, my morning practice dragged on and I came late that day; but hmm, wasn’t Asama-san, having been fondled by the chancellor, crying out of happiness...?”

“I-I’m sorry, wh-what kind of character do I have inside Adele’s head!?”

“Isn’t it fine?” Naomasa said.

“—It might be that from tomorrow onwards, this kind of topic might be hard to bring up after all.”

•

“Isn’t that right?”

With her double-colored eyes, Asama looked at her friend with an artificial arm who had asked the question.

When she did that, Naomasa, walking, also glanced her way.

“Well, Kimi also knows about it.”

She kept silent and listened. With that, Naomasa looked forward...

“That idiot Kimi is continuing to idiotically act like an idiot; but she’s an idiot who’s really caring, isn’t she? People who care about other people too much are the true idiots, though. If tomorrow Toori confesses and it goes well, she’s the person it’ll pain the most after all...and despite that, that idiot isn’t among us, talking here.”

“That’s—”

Asama remembered. About the time earlier, when everyone had split up atop

the stairs. Asama, who had left the Tea Club and ran to them, couldn't do anything but confirm the plans for the night. Even after that, Kimi...

"...Stayed sitting atop the stairs, didn't she?"

"Yeah, when we split up earlier and left each other, Toori said that he'd try and go to 'Remorse Way' after all... You know, right?"

"About?"

"That idiot Toori hasn't walked 'Remorse Way' for ten years since that happened."

"You do know it, don't you?" Naomasa continued her words.

"It seems like he decided it this morning. When we were informed yesterday that our gathering would be outside, I pretty much knew what he would be doing during our morning exercise. When we sprinted and leaped outwards from the Academy, straight ahead, the 'Remorse Way' was on the right side of the two starboard and port roads. And..."

"Last time, during a lesson at the end of the second year, we ran to the dango shop on the port of Asakusa... Looking in terms of progression, it's only logical we'd run to the starboard this time."

Asama answered, and Adele looked towards Okutama. Narrowing her eyes, hidden deep beneath her glasses...

"Then, um, the reason that Kimi-san continued to sit on the stairs was..."

"Because given the idiotic sister she is, she was watching over whether or not her idiotic brother would be able to pass 'Remorse Way'."

"She's an idiotic woman," Naomasa said whilst taking a step forward.

"Being here, we're also idiots. No one who's here, no, no one who's part of our class has the right to mock her. After all..."

After all.

"The person who didn't let Toori leave us was that idiotic woman."

At those words, everyone held their breath even while walking. With an attitude that indicated that they no longer cared about the busyness or noise of

the commercial street around them, the silence continued for a while; but...

“That’s right.”

Finally, Asama found her words.

“And everything...was because of Horizon, I think.”

“Hori...zon...”

Suzu opened her mouth while dropping her head. While softly ringing the metal cylinders, the hanging object-oriented sensors at her waist.

“Sh-she was a...gentle person.”

Suzu spoke with a soft voice. Adding a “You know,” she bridged to her next line and said...

“D-did you know? When Toori-kun...called me, at first, he would definitely say ‘Heeey,’ or ‘You know.’ And, h-he would reach his hand out to me and...when he touched me, u-um, hi-his hands would do...do this.”

At the tip of everybody’s gaze, Asama included, Suzu’s hand touched the area around the waist of her uniform, in a manner as if brushing past it.

That was a moment where she looked as if she was wiping her hands. However, there was something else in the noise of her rustling clothes.

“Th-this is a signal... I-I’m...bl-blind, so if my name is su-suddenly called, and I’m touched... I-I’ll ge-get shocked, and cause trouble; s-so, before that, they’d make another voice or noise.”

“Yeah, we copied them too. During elementary school, when we noticed that the idiot was doing that, I figured it was one of the little things that redeemed him; but...”

“No,” Suzu shook her head, slightly rushed.

“Horizon...started that.”

She sucked in a breath.

“Even when Horizon di-died, Toori-kun...di-didn’t forget.”

“I see,” Naomasa said, as well as “I’m sorry.”

Asama could do nothing but hold a smile.

...Perhaps...

It could be that Suzu-san loves him, so she thought.

At that moment, a voice came from in front of them.

“Huh? So you guys also went shopping here after all?”

This voice is... Turning their faces towards it, on the walkway directly in front of them, several male students were walking.

As expected, Neshinbara, Urquiaga, Shirojiro and Heidi were there, clutching bags.

“What is this, you guys? You’re looking forward to the festival that much?”

“Ah, we’re buying our share for tonight. But...it looks like we overlapped in terms of the food.”

At Neshinbara’s wry smile, everyone also smiled dryly. With an expression where the corners of her eyes were drooping, Heidi said...

“But...is there anywhere else but here? If we went to Okutama, then we’d disturb Toori-kun and Kimi-san after all; and you can’t find this shop on Murayama.”

Heidi looked at the row of shops on the starboard-side, at the walkway across the street.

Everyone followed suit, and at the destination of their sight there was a single snack shop. A shop with a bakery as its side-business was on standby at the time. Whilst the woman who was the shopkeeper did the cleaning of the storefront, she was making conversation with the owners of the adjacent stores.

Asama noticed that Suzu had turned to her back. Therefore, discreetly, with a small voice...

“Suzu-san, you haven’t come here since last year, have you?”

“Yes... Wh-when I passed by, i-it was scary.”

“I see.” After Asama, who nodded, lightly touched the binder skirt at her

waist, she took Suzu's shoulder.

At that moment. The female shopkeeper of the snack shop turned to face them. When she noticed them, she showed a smile...

"What do we have here? From the mornin' til' now, there've been a lot of customers from the Academy, huh. It's still out of openin' hours, y'know?"

"Ah, I'm sorry."

Heidi answered. She touched her cheek with her hand, and after bowing shallowly...

"Um...tomorrow, we might be making a racket..."

"Ya having a party? If that's so, I guess I'll have P-01s work hard."

"Haha," Asama listened to the words that Heidi said in response to the laughing shopkeeper.

"A party...that's right. Yes. I believe it'll be alright."

She took a breath.

"Because everyone is praying that this will be a fun party."

•

"It would be nice if we have some fun tomorrow. Don't you think so? Gachan?"

A resounding voice was brought to life in the open pathway.

Walking the pathway, where the blue sky beginning to tint with the color of afternoon was visible, was someone with six golden wings. It was Margot Naito in her uniform. While opening up her speedometer-type Magi Figur by her head, the place she was making her way through was the long direct pathway where people and goods went back and forth. It was a horizontal transport-passage on the starboard of Murayama, where ships and winged figures came and went.

In the center-segment of Musashi, the starboard horizontal transport-passage that opened up in the starboard wall through a hatch was a delivery opening that sent the goods received from the continental port on the opposite side of

the ship during Musashi's stop to Musashino and Okutama.

At this time, the passage would be bustling with deliverers passing through with business or personal things...

"Ga-chan, by 'upwards' you mean you're doing an ascending race in a gravitated space, right? Will you be coming out afterward?"

"That's right; once I finish this job, let's go again. Should we learn from Almirante or Marine? We've finally gotten recommended to EDEL Brocken as aerial-equipment testers by that lady Wildkamelie, so I want to do some customization of Weiss Fräulein. Same for your Schwarz Fräulein right?"

"Yeah." Nodding at Naruze's voice, audible from the Magi Figur, Naito once again raised the work permit she carried on her right arm. Sticking a broom into a cart laden with numerous small packages, she hurried towards the bow.

While moving through the voices and movements of the crowd, she sent her voice in response through the Magi Figur, its needle waving...

"Just wait a little bit, okay? Somehow today, the coming and going of goods is kinda strange and everyone is packed together. Nai-chan feels a little troubled. Just like Shiro said, goods are only coming onboard."

"That's fine, if there's a lot coming from Mikawa then I should also move."

From the other side of the Magi Figur, voices sounded from Naruze's line. With her juniors' voices...

"—The upperclassmen are going out into the sky! We'll be cheering for you! We bet our club fees on you!"

"Ah, that's right, this is also for the Manga Research's new work, 'Kobo-san' ... But, how much more goods do you need to transport?"

"I've only got one urgent delivery, I think? All the rest should be fine to do at night, probably. But well, it's not good to be in too much of a hurry, right? A while ago, the KKK delivery section accidentally stuffed the Manga Research goods into K.P.A. Italia's guest ship after all."

"Yeah, three thousand books our club's homo-section made for events. The King was a skillful-seme, wasn't he?"

“Please refrain from putting real characters into your stories, Ga-chan. I mean, I think that the King is a clumsy-seme.”

“I wasn’t the one who drew it, you know. Well, I didn’t think that the King they sent here was going to voice an objection to Hexagone Française, but instead he objected to Lord Ita. The invention of printing techniques as a result of history recreation is cruel.”

“Well,” Naruze’s voice was audible from the handheld.

“I’ll finish up quickly, take my third victory today, and prepare for tonight. It’d be shameful if a Weiss Hexen and Schwarz Hexen made the night’s activities stink of the mood you have after returning from work.”

“That’s right.” Naito stopped in her tracks, because some people were bringing a 10-meter class large-scale wooden box from the transportation ship into the ship interior and the security officers of the horizontal transport-passage had given the traffic signals for pedestrians to stop for a while.

Naito, who lined up in the queue of people who had stopped, sighed and looked at Okutama and Musashino, visible beyond the spell windshield.

The special characteristics of Musashino were the ship-type bow and the spell controller that blanketed the sky of the stern like a roof. And as for Okutama, it had floors of residential districts and natural districts layered upon each other like stairs. Musashi Ariadust Academy was located on the highest level of those stairs, and the stair that went towards the starboard-side Remorse Way from in front of the Academy was clearly visible even from here.

It was a distance where one could make out the figures of those atop the stairs, but where individuals couldn’t be determined.

However, Naito looked at a single small figure sitting on the Academy stairs.

“Ga-chan... Can you see Kimi-chan?”

“Judge. —I can see her clearly from Musashino. Because Kimi isn’t moving.”

“Which is to say the chancellor hasn’t moved from the front of Remorse Way either, has he?”

“Yeah... Is there anything you’d like to say regarding those two?”

“Yeah,” Naito reached into the cart of small packages and grabbed hold of one of them.

“One urgent package is addressed to the student council, you know? The delivery label is printed with ‘Climax! Virgin Queen Elizabeth First Edition’, so the one who asked for this is the chancellor, huh.”

“Please choose whether you want to be serious or make a tsukkomi about it, Naito. Rather, didn’t he say that the eroge this morning was the last one?”

“This’s camouflaged as an educational package from IZUMO Divine Transmission’s educational program, ‘Working Grandpa’; they messed up the delivery label. This should be the continuation of ‘One After the Next with Henry VIII!’.”

“Like I said, please don’t make your comment include difficult references.”

“That so?” Naito, who tilted her head, looked beside her; looked at a figure there who, just like herself, was waiting on the traffic...

“Ah, it’s Seijun.”

•

At the sudden voice, Masazumi’s body shook.

She turned back, and at the tip of her gaze the six-golden-winged Naito was there. Masazumi looked at the pushcart and asked...

“...Your part-time job?”

“No, this is Nai-chan’s real job. What’re you doing?”

“Ah, I’m returning from Mikawa. And well, I was thinking of going towards the school, towards Remorse Way.”

“Judge, I see, at this time the ship exterior is pretty crowded, huh.”

“...? Naito? Has Masazumi come? If she has, tell her about tonight and that item...”

“Tonight?” At the voice that leaked from the Magi Figur, Masazumi tilted her neck. In response, Naito nodded...

“Ga-chan, I’ll do it right now, so wait... Then, um, Seijun, the chancellor said

he was going to have a 'ghost hunt' at the school tonight. We meet at the stairs at 8:00 PM. Are you coming?"

Being asked, Masazumi felt a slight relief. *They invited me, huh?* However, she replied...

"Ah, no; earlier when we were outside I was told by President Sakai, but..."

"You can't?"

In response to the question, Masazumi averted her gaze unintentionally and said...

"If everyone from the student council is there, then... It'd be a bad example."

She, who muttered, "I'm sorry," thought: *I'm a letdown, aren't I.* But, speaking to make her understand...

"I'll be at Murayama, so if I tried to go to Okutama at night, I'd have to pass the police-box during its night shift. If I did that, I'd be troubling my father as well."

"Masazumi's father is a big member of the provisional council, right?"

"Well... That's right."

She was a bit lost about how to answer, when suddenly Naito raised the package in her hand along with a smile.

"Then, I'll give you this. It's an item addressed to the student council."

"Huh?" Accepting it even while asking, Masazumi looked at the delivery label of the package in her hand...

"Why is this addressed to the student council..."

"Could you just put that aside and bring it there for me? I mean, the chancellor is close to Remorse Way right now after all... I think you should go meet him, you know?"

"Why? Why should I meet him?"

At Masazumi's question, Naito attached the portable vault she had taken from the cart to the latch behind her waist, and answered with a smile.

“Mm... It has something to do with the topic tomorrow. What’s popular is important to a young girl, after all.”

Right after she said it, Naito brought the cart right up to the wall; and removing her broom, she covered the cart. She locked it, and faster than Masazumi could turn around, behind her a breeze blew through the air where the wind of her passage passed through.

...*Eh?*

Turning around, Masazumi saw that a group of men and women, each of them wearing the old flight uniforms of different countries and flying through the air with brooms, flying instruments, or with their own wings, had stopped in midair.

Several of them looked this way, in Naito’s direction...

“Come up here, ‘Zwei Fräulein!’ We won’t lose this time! We’ll show you the power of the old generation!”

•

Naito brushed the Orei Metallo (Wisdom Ore) at the tip of her broom, and turned around while carrying out her start-up operations.

She faced her delivery rivals, who were in the air beyond the startled Masazumi...

“Won’t you wait a bit? Ascending in gravitated space is Nai-chan and Ga-chan’s weakness, so I’d like to do it.”

“Overcoming your weakness, what spirit! You’re worthy of our training!”

“ ‘Almirante’, you’re already a geezer, so back down. When it comes to two-man units, we, the former aces of Hexagone Française have slightly above a 60% chance of victory against you two, who aren’t Technohexen.”

“Yeah? I’ll seriously drag out the anti-god of war combat manual from when I was in active duty and do some combat maneuvers...the fact that I was a small fry like you three years ago was because I’d been taught by troublesome brats.”

“Ahaha,” Naito laughed, and ran. Masazumi, who stood on the pathway, asked...

“...What...is all of this?”

“Ah, a race and mock battle that everyone from the delivery businesses is doing. We start when the observers are gone, so it’s called ‘Geheimnis Sabbat’. We do technical research and training, and we also make some money on the side by displaying it and betting on it.”

“I haven’t seen it from up close, but...”

“You should come with us this time, you know? There are going to be strange snacks up there, and we’re going to pull an all-nighter at Tsukiichi.”

“Right?” She called out, and everyone in the air nodded. Now, the clothes and equipment of those who had gathered were all from the aerial squadrons of every country. There were many people in Masazumi’s grade or younger, but she had heard that the reason that it was mainly irregular races and older witches was because they were people who had fled the oppression brought on by the hunting of heretics and gathered at Musashi.

In all the other countries, there was no time limit on graduation from the Academy; but in the Far East, it had been decided that graduation from the Academy comes at 18. Therefore, ever since they’ve come to Musashi they couldn’t be in service. However...

“Come now, aces of the current duty! The old aces have come to learn! Show us the skills that brought ‘Wildkamelie’ to her knees and led you to become testers for ‘EDEL Brocken’!”

“Ahaha, if Ga-chan isn’t here I can’t match you guys, though... If she were here, we’d be invincible.”

Leaving everyone, who said, “Go on, Go on!” in front of her, Naito waved to Masazumi and said...

“Then, please give the item to the chancellor, alright?”

“Ah, yes.” Turning her back to Masazumi, who said those words, Naito launched her body into the air.

She leapt into the empty sky. In response to the wind that naturally caught in her wings and the sensation of suspension where there’s no longer any support

for her legs, Naito stuck the speedometer-type Magi Figur into her palm.

“Model Summon: Product Name ‘Beginning of a Sleeping Face’: Confirm.”

Technomagic is a spell that ARIA-calculates the expended ether in its most elementary unit, ATELL. However, the created spell is saved as a focal instrument, and if it’s necessary that calculation can be summoned immediately with no need for an ARIA. What was being carried out was that...

“ ‘Beginning of a Sleeping Face’: Quintet Activation: —Confirm.”

At the same time, three speedometers appeared at the brush-part of the broom. Two appeared at the tip.

“Oooh,” Almirante spoke...

“Aren’t you making any spells other than that one?! What umpteenth Model is that?”

“Spontaneous creation is wasteful, so I’m just saving the most appropriate one as a pattern. Everyone’s copying me, so the division of the pattern folder is troublesome... Anyways, I’ll do this without ‘Schwarz Fräulein’, so let’s race one round, alright? On the way there I’ll meet up with Ga-chan and we’ll do the second round, which is upwards, right?”

“Oooh,” as if taking in their voices, a shockwave of air burst out from the brush-part of the broom.

In the next instant, Naito’s body and vision rose up into the sky above Musashi.

The sky.

Below her, on the top of Musashi, bathing in the rays of the afternoon sun, there lay the expanses of towns and natural parks.

It’s so big. As she thought that, the heat waves and wind chasing her from below were visible to her gaze.

Everyone is chasing. Each one is adapting to my form, and learning. For me, who has no place where I belong as a witch and was brought along by the flow of life to Musashi, they’re an existence I’m thankful for. In the beginning, we had clashes; but as we kept going, I was recognized, I learned, and now we’re equal.

And furthermore...

...The chancellor and Kimi-chan...

In front of the Academy on Okutama, there were two figures she knew in front of “Remorse Way”; but while Naito brought the tip of her broom to face the northern skies, she confirmed that the two were staying unmoving...

One round. *Even if I do that, those two won't move, right?* Thus she thought.

Chapter 11: Adults in the Pub

CHAPTER 11

"Adults in the Pub"



To be able to say that oneself is worthless.
Is because one is not in a worthless position.
If so, that one is able to laugh at that oneself.
Why is that so.

Point Allocation (Point of View)

*To be able to say that oneself is worthless
Is because one is not in a worthless position
If so, that one is able to laugh at that oneself
Why is that so*

Point Allocation (Point of View)

•

“—That’s how it is. There’s nothing but bad memories when it comes to what happened before.”

Inside the wooden building, the voice of a stocky man could be heard.

The location was a space in the outskirts of Mikawa, a space that included a kitchen and counter, around 20-tatami in size. It was a cafeteria where alcohol and snacks were served.

By the entrance, tables and chairs of wood were lined up; but the inner half was merely covered with tatami. From that expanse of tatami, a voice said...

“Alright, let’s put that past behind us and have a change of heart. Faced with you, who’s become perverted, we’ve finally after ten years said that we should meet; and we went so far as to prepare a place that you’re familiar with, yet...”

Sakai, Tadakatsu, Sakakibara, and the girl who followed Tadakatsu surrounded a table in the heart of the building; and within them, Tadakatsu simultaneously thudded a medium-sized sake bottle drained of its contents against the table as his voice rang out.

“Sakai, you still touch your opponent’s butt in the middle of combat, just like you used to!?”

“You know, normally, one wouldn’t make their daughter fight against their great friend upon a reunion, you know? Futayo, right? I’ve seen your name before, but you’ve really become strong. Seriously setting someone like that on me, Da-chan, just like ten years ago; there’s something wrong with your brain, huh? If we were playing an RPG, you’re the type who acts like you’ve immediately been cursed with Doom in a battle.”

“You’re damned noisy. You always do stuff like that, doing things by yourself; that’s why you were demoted to the student president of Musashi, you know!? In other words...”

“Hey, hey, Da-chan, I won’t let you get drunk at noon and loop your story three times. Rather, it’s nice being a student president, y’know? When I want to talk with young girls, when I want to talk to female teachers, when I want to line up all the youngsters and pretend that I’m the commander of an elite squadron in my heart while having a morning assembly... How do you think it is being a student president? Right, Sakakibara!?”

“Why are you turning to me?”

So he said, and Sakai and Tadakatsu looked at Sakakibara in unison...

“—Hey you, your reactions have always really been horrible!”

The girl behind Tadakatsu, Futayo, slightly raised her hand.

“Father, since before during the triple-loop it feels as if Sakakibara-sama has been oppressed by something; but...”

“Ahh, Futayo, don’t you remember our rhythm from ten years ago? It’s been 10 years since I’ve met them, I didn’t think it’d return to the same situation of that time if I came this far...”

“Judge,” Futayo nodded. Bowing lightly while remaining seated...

“If it is possible, please introduce yourself again...”

•

For Honda Futayo, who studies the sword, the Matsudaira Four Heavenly Kings who include her father, Tadakatsu, are a special existence.

Currently, because of the frequent occurrences of phenomena in Mikawa due to the “clearing out” and the operations of New Nagoya Castle, the number of people have become few. Those who act as representatives of the few people left there are but her father and Sakakibara; the others have had their inherited names taken by automatons and withdrawn, leaving Mikawa.

The Honda family also moved what was important to them to the alternate territory of the Matsudaira, Edo, and they had a small mansion in the outskirts.

In these few years, even Futayo had not set foot near the central district. However today, because this place that was called “the place that you’re familiar with” was near the center, in her mind she remained alert of the occurrence of phenomena.

...Despite that, they and Father are bold...

The Matsudaira Four Heavenly Kings’ popularity was still high among those who had moved to the outskirts. Recently, I have not seen Ii Naomasa who had left on something like a business trip; but he, Father, and Sakakibara had become great among those who remained in Mikawa.

And now, the people always spoke of Sakai.

...In essence, the person who was treated as the leader of the Matsudaira Four Heavenly Kings.

I had met him before. I had talked to him before. However, these were things that had happened more than ten years ago, and I do not really remember them; so I also did not know the worth or meaning of my opponent’s existence. I just assumed that he was simply a hunchbacked old man.

Therefore, for Futayo, only Sakai is excluded from the Four Heavenly Kings.

How deep is the acclamation of his worth, government, martial arts, and personality that people speak of?

Now, the person himself was before her eyes, but...

“Ah, I’m Sakai Tadatsugu. I’m seriously way more awesome than your father. Your father and I were in a local class, and Sakakibara over there and Ii, who isn’t here, were in the admitted class since the fourth year of elementary school. Something like thirty years ago, when Musashi Ariadust Academy was made on Musashi, these guys tried to get in from somewhere else, but they couldn’t.”

“That’s because, at that time, they were prioritizing applicants from different countries as a sign that Ariadust was very open. Ii-kun and I were thinking about what was the best for the Divine States, to the point where we withdrew our admission.”

“That’s a good excuse, huh. Anyways, during our school days, Lord Teacher... Lord Motonobu was the student president and permanent student council president, so I was the chancellor, and your father was the leader of the Special Attack Division.”

“Say Vice Chancellor, you damned idiot. Even now, I’m the exception of Mikawa, the special security vice chancellor, allowed by the Testament Union.”

“I’m ignoring you, but that’s nice. Then, Ii was the student council vice president, and Sakakibara was just all talk.”

“All talk...”

Sakakibara was drinking barley tea, but upon receiving Futayo’s gaze he waved his hand hurriedly...

“Th-that wasn’t it at all! I was the secretary, and I was gifted in humanities!”

“Something like that,” Father and Sakai nodded. First, Father said...

“Certainly, you were talented in humanities, Sakakibara. During the Academy Festival, when you recited the poem in the graduation anthology of the elementary school, ‘The We of Tomorrow’, it was pretty well received...by us only.”

“I know, right? Even now, it’s a nice memory. During elementary school, we used to play a lot by throwing a pile of firecrackers from the fourth floor of the Academy, right? A ‘Bang!’ noise would sound, and when you looked downwards from the window, Sakakibara, who was going home, would be lying flat on his face, smoke rising from his head. Ah, no, I still remember it clearly. The arms of people who’ve fainted always hang really loosely, huh.”

“Ahh,” Futayo nodded, and she saw that veins had popped out on Sakakibara’s temple as he twisted the side of his mouth; but Futayo said nothing. *These are the topics of adults*, Futayo thought. *It is best for children to not speak out.*

However, the topic coming from the adults had headed towards me.

Sakai, who had picked up a handcrafted clay pitcher of Japanese sake, asked me a question, a smile on his face.

“Damusume-kun^[15], you’re about the age where you throw off the brainwashing of your athletic-type dad, right? A time of rebellion, right? Won’t you come to our Academy? I rather want people like you. Honda Masazumi is there too, y’know? Do you remember her?”

Damusume... Futayo twisted the edges of her mouth, and muttered. However, in the words he had uttered just now there was a name she was familiar with.

“I have not really met face to face with Masazumi ever since middle school; but I had heard that she had gone to Musashi. I also heard that she’s the student council vice president now...”

“That’s right, that’s right, so, won’t you come? I think that stereo-Honda would be interesting.”

With that, Father, who was between Sakai and I, first flipped the medium-sized sake bottle upside down and confirmed that there was nothing inside. That done, he glanced towards me, and with a voice that could be heard by Sakai...

“Futayo, pay him no mind. Ever since before, he’s a pitiful man who’s had the misunderstanding ‘I’m loved by everyone else!’ In elementary school, he was the type to answer ‘Everyone!’ without hesitation when asked the question: ‘How many friends have you made?’ by the graduation anthology teacher. He’s the super-opposite of Sakakibara, who wrote ‘None’; but there was no helping it, so we became his bulkhead.”

After about halfway through what he said, Sakakibara, on the other side of table, waved his hand to the left and right with a slight motion.

...It must have been difficult.

Futayo thought. However, it was certain that she had been questioned by Sakai just now.

...Come to Musashi, huh.

The Far East’s only territory. Because it moved, an Aerial Ship that circled the entire Far East.

The student president of Musashi, who was in good circumstances, had

invited her; so what would follow would be perfect.

However, I could not give an answer immediately. Because...

“—Wait a bit, Sakai.”

Father spoke with a clear-cut tone.

He asked the automaton working in the kitchen for another sake-bottle and a dozen chicken skewers...

“Whatever she chooses, right now Mikawa is not allowed to have any exchanges with Musashi or other countries. It would be different if this was a year ago, but this year you cannot even try to have her go to Musashi.”

Therefore...

“The leading ship of the guard unit is always out of Mikawa as a scout ship, going with you guys, right? It goes all the way to Aki to check the safety of the corridor... This time, Futayo will be managing the leading ship. After all, right now, Futayo is the commanding officer of Mikawa’s guard unit.”

“Ehh? The commanding officer of Mikawa’s guard unit, the only self-defense military force allowed by the Testament Union? You probably can’t have any guns yet, being restricted by the Testament’s history recreation; but you’re pretty good with close combat battles and skirmishes, right?”

“I told her that this had to be done during the period when she goes and comes back from Aki, but after that, when she disembarks, she can do whatever she likes.”

“By whatever she likes, you...”

Father answered Sakai’s question.

That was something that I had decided with Father the day before. What I would do with myself from now on...

“—I told her to decide everything by herself. So, invite her then. If Futayo needs you or Musashi, she’ll join you. If she wants to inherit my name, she’ll do something else. That’s what it means.”

Father spoke.

“From now on, the world will change... I want my daughter to do as she wills.”

“That’s nice.”

...Eh?

Sakai’s eyes flicked this way. He raised his eyebrows slightly, and with a smile said...

“You’re the talent that Honda Tadakatsu, the strongest of the Matsudaira... no, Honda Tadakatsu of the Far East, called the ‘Peerless in the East’, has chosen... It must’ve been interesting growing up, right? How much is expected of you? Really.”

“...It seems like you’re praising me, but you’re not interested in anything but Futayo, huh.”

“Shouldn’t that be obvious? A young child is far more easy to deceive than a geezer who’s still serving as vice chancellor even though he’s decided to retire. However, the name of the ‘Peerless in the West’ Tachibana Muneshige, has been inherited at the Ootomo in Tres España, so since I’ve connections here, I was wondering if something wouldn’t come out of this.”

Sakai took a breath. In response, Futayo had her hands full stopping the trembling in her heart.

The former leader of the Matsudaira Four Heavenly Kings. To test him, who had drawn a 10 year blank, I challenged him, who was in plain clothes, by my father’s orders. Furthermore, I had asked my father about the opponent’s habits, and made preparations for acceleration spells.

However, the result was clear.

I was able to reach my hand out, but I could not touch him.

That that kind of opponent has interest in me is something to be thankful for.

In any case, Futayo had mostly never left Mikawa. Basically, the only ones she had shown her talent to were her father and the instructional automatons. Along with the feeling that she had slacked off in her training...

...I am uneasy as to whether or not my power is enough.

The Tachibana Muneshige who had been mentioned just now was the adopted son of one of the strongest of the west, who had been called unparalleled in the past, Tachibana Dousetsu. And I had heard that he had already fought in other places.

I had thought that this would eventually happen to me too, but finally it is a reality.

At that moment. Sakai opened his mouth and looked at the surroundings.

“—In the end, it seems that Li didn’t come. What happened to him?”

•

Sakai asked. Sakakibara—

“li-kun is...”

“li’s gone out on some business.”

Sakai saw it. He saw the fact that Futayo jerked her head upwards at Tadakatsu’s words, that had interrupted Sakakibara. Her eyes seemed to want to ask, “Is that so?” *Then...*, what Sakai thought was...

“...Is it confidential?”

“Judge,” Tadakatsu said. At that instant.

From afar, outside the shop, footsteps rang out. Futayo looked at the exit of the shop, at the owner of the footsteps that entered...

“Kazuno-sama.”

“Judge.”

Answering and stopping on the entrance of the tatami room was a tall figure in a maid uniform. Sakai, who looked at the black horn shaped sensors extending from the top of her head, dropped the sake bottle in his hand.

“Geh, Kazuno...!”

“Judge. —How sad. I was thinking about who this might be, was it Sakai-sama after all?”

She, Kazuno, brought her gaze to Sakai, her eyes half-closed...

“Coming to this place after getting demoted, drinking sake without regard of a young girl in the room, who actually has a future... I am able to judge that you are a serious adult. Futayo-sama, please return to the mansion.”

“...Da-chan, just like 10 years ago, this woman's still with you?”

“I couldn't help it. She's able to replicate the cooking of my late wife, able to replicate her sword skills as well, and she's also able to teach people etiquette...”



Kazuno

“Judge.”

Kazuno dipped her head this way.

“Currently, I am serving as an instructor for the basics to Futayo-sama. Futayo-sama is a woman of marrying age, but when she accompanies Tadakatsu-sama, she will try to enter the bath with him, or go to barbecue stores, so she is a failure at the moment — It is a sorry state of affairs.”

“Yeah, even back then, the ‘Da’ in ‘Da-chan’ has been the ‘Da’ in ‘Damn, I’m a failure as a human being.’ ”

It happened just as Sakai spoke.

Something sharp pierced the air about three centimeters in front of his right eye.

It was a bamboo skewer.

A bamboo skewer, barbecued chicken still on it, floated in the air, aimed towards my right eye.

Looking further, Kazuno had thrust her hand out at shoulder height.

“—It is well within the effective range of my gravity control. Though you are such a failure, you are still the master of this house, so please refrain from performing such stupid actions.”

“...Da-chan. Does this woman still go by the devilish rule that only she can badmouth you, just like she used to!? If you’re her master, then do something! Being like this for more than ten years...her personality as an automaton is broken.”

“I’m pretty bad at verbal fights.”

“It is not as if this personality is the basic one for automatons, so there are no problems. Ever since the Age of the Gods, automatons have been set to serve humans; but we were never set to respect them.”

“Automatons’ right of existence^[16], huh.”

“Judge.”

Kazuno nodded.

“I am unable to fling people other than the people I am supposed to serve left and right using gravity control, but I am able to indirectly cause harm to them. Please be careful from now on.”

As she said those words, she lowered the bamboo skewer to the plate, lining it up next to the others.

Simultaneously, Kazuno bowed and spoke.

“It is time for the preparations for Futayo-sama’s ship to be made.”

“Judge, judge,” Tadakatsu stood up, and with a bow, Futayo also stood herself up.

“See you later.” Tadakatsu turned his back, but raising his right hand lightly, he spoke these words:

“—Well then, this is it for us. Stay sharp.”

•

After that, Sakai and Sakakibara watched as the two women and one man, all three of them possessing the strength of a warrior, exited the restaurant. After they had vanished from sight, their footsteps had disappeared, and the sound of their conversation could no longer reach Sakai and Sakakibara’s ears...after the only thing that could be heard were the sounds of kitchen knives and flowing water coming from the kitchen, Sakai propped his elbow against the table.

“Sakakibara...the truth is that... Da-chan ate and ran without paying.”

“I only ordered a barley tea.”

“Hey, c’mon, I have no money. If I put it on my bill, the payment’ll come during our visit to Mikawa next year, you know?”

“It’s not as if I pay...”

“Then it’ll be my debt, won’t it?”

Sakai’s voice echoed softly through the shop, empty if not for them.

“I’ll make a debt. That’s what I’m talking about. You understand, don’t you?”

“What do you mean by ‘That’s what I’m talking about?’ ”

“The reason that you and I are still here. That’s right, I’ll pay your share and Da-chan’s share, creating two debts...so in exchange, you’ll tell me two things.”

The first was...

“About Ii. Da-chan was avoiding it all along, but you tried to talk about it, didn’t you? What’s wrong with Ii? ...The End of Days is approaching, and being in Mikawa, the site of so many phenomena...did something happen to him?”

And the other was...

“—There is an automaton in Musashi called P-01s. She came to Musashi last year. What is she?”

“If I were to say what she was...”

Having spoken up till that point, Sakakibara shook his head. He tore his gaze from Sakai, standing up slowly...

“Well, shall we head outside? ...After all, it’s easier to talk while walking.”

Chapter 12: Innocents in Remorse Way

CHAPTER 12

"Innocents in Remorse Way"



It occurs within the afternoon sunlight.
The movements of the thoughts that seem to escape one's grasp.
Where could their destination be.

Point Allocation (Family)

It occurs within the afternoon sunlight

The movements of the thoughts that seem to escape one's grasp Where could their destination be

Point Allocation (Family)

•

A single figure was seated atop the stairs.

That person was Kimi, her long hair fluttering in the wind.

Sitting on the stairs, she was propping her face up on her palm, looking downward all the while.

Below her there was a large stairway, the second schoolyard, and another stairway. In the second schoolyard, the clubs of the physical type were performing mock battles and undergoing combat practice as part of their respective club activities.

However, Kimi was directing her gaze beyond them and their actions.

What she was looking at lay beyond the school campus. It was a straight path forward in the nature sectors.

In front of the road, paved with resin meant to imitate stone paving, a single boy stood.

The lines of his uniformed, slender figure showed he was Toori.

Kimi looked at his back as he stood there, unmoving. She said this, sighing as she spoke: "If you're scared, it's fine if you go back, Toori — Because you're my idiot brother."

Kimi spoke those words, hugging her knee to herself. And after a while, at the place she was looking at, Toori started to move. He would wind around, repeatedly start to sprint with his body slanted forwards, and pole-dance low on a streetlight's pole...

"Hehehe, that idiot brother of mine. Just as I thought that the atmosphere was right, you punch it right in the face."

It was just as Toori had pole-danced too much and had started to slowly crawl

up the streetlight's pole like a bug.

A voice could be heard from behind Kimi.

"What's Toori doing? Huh? Is that a new type of game? Or should I blow him off it?"

"Teeheehee, Sensei. I had heard that you were drinking in the cafeteria, but what have *you* come here for?"

"Well, maybe... I'm just enjoying the cold air."

A figure clad in a jumper, bottle of sake clutched under her arm, sat down to Kimi's right.

The figure fixed her hair, which was slightly mussed.

Kimi frowned at her.

"Fufufu, Sensei. You can't comb your fingers through your hair unless it's for fashion. Toori does it a lot; but it'll damage your hair, so leave it to me."

As Oriotorai was seated next to her, Kimi combed her hair with a comb she took out from her bosom.

Oriotorai left her hair to be fixed by Kimi as she wished; but she relaxed her face, which was flushed with blood as a result of her drinking.

"Heehee."

"What is it? That's really creepy, Sensei."

"Ah, no, I was reminiscing about how a granny in the neighborhood would do this for me."

"A granny... Could it be that you come from the Izumo district?"

"Hehehe," Oriotorai narrowed her eyes as she laughed.

"Well, I've been to lots of places, but I'm probably the most happy here."

"Fufufu, Sensei. Please don't tell me your life story even after suddenly getting all drunk and treating me like a granny."

"Isn't it fine? Or maybe I should say, for me, this is a day to be celebrated as well."

“Oh, what a coincidence, this is a day of celebration for Toori as well. It would be nice if he wanted to celebrate more tomorrow, though.”

Hearing Kimi speak, Oriotorai nodded. She turned her gaze to Kimi.

“You’re kind.”

“...Wait, don’t look this way, the comb won’t pass through properly, will it?”

“Sorry, sorry,” Oriotorai apologized, but she touched her neck with her empty hand.

She fingered the chain hanging there before moving on to the other chain dropped towards her chest.

“Keep going, keep going...”

Her words were directed to the subject of her gaze, Toori, who stood atop a pole.

Kimi combed the back of her hair.

“Fufu, will Sensei be my idiot brother’s ally?”

“Whether or not I’ll be the idiot brother’s ally, I don’t know, but I will become Aoi Toori’s ally~ Or Kimi, or anybody else’s. At the very least, I’m definitely the ally of everyone in my class... Ah, but, teaching staff can’t be directly involved in inter-student battles; so when it comes to that, you’ll have to forgive me, alright?”

“Yes.”

Kimi nodded. She stood up to comb the other side of Oriotorai’s hair.

“...Oh? Ah, as I thought.”

“What is it?”

“Before, Masazumi crossed over here, coming from Tama over there. Somehow, it seems that she was trying to pass through to the halfway point of Remorse Way from the nature sector, but she’s a girl who always seems to cut through weird places...”

Kimi lightly touched the comb to her chin, inclining her head.

“Teehee, but well, I wonder what the vice president intends to do? Going to a place like Remorse Way...”

•

There existed a figure striding through the forest.

In the midst of the forest, shadowy due to the afternoon sunlight, Masazumi walked as she looked around the area.

Masazumi was carrying a paper package under her right arm.

“Coming in from the side in order to take a shortcut to Remorse Way was a bad idea...”

I thought to follow what the café’s female shopkeeper had said and stop by Remorse Way before I headed to the Academy and gave this small package to Toori. Lying right in front of Ariadust Academy, Remorse Way was a road that passed through a section of several nature sectors, lined up next to each other. If you walked through the nature sectors sideways, you should reach it faster than circling around the edges of each sector, but...

...I’m not lost, am I?

The nature sectors came in blocks, just like the residential and transportation sectors; but to recreate natural conditions, in places where natural sectors lined up the divisions between blocks were not clear. Where the greenery grew tight, a wall of leaves and branches came into being. I had already passed by several roads, but I only just realized that the number I had crossed didn’t match up with my calculations.

“...Somehow, it seems that I’m leading myself into being spirited away.”

When I was in Mikawa, there were many similarities amongst the phenomena that happened within the city. And above all else...the “Princess Disappearances”.

I still remember the phenomenon where my mother disappeared. I still remember what I saw when I returned home: The people in the neighborhood gathered around the fence and the magisterial automatons searched my house.

The feeling of loss and the regret that welled up afterward still exist in my

heart as if they were fresh memories. The fact that the phenomena took someone close to me remains fresh in my mind as well.

Even now, after one year has passed, I don't want to ever make time for myself to be alone; and though the clerical phone I wasn't carrying at the time is the cheapest you can find, I always carry it with me now, never letting it leave my skin. Just like it's a charm.

"No way. I'm pretty sure that I'm already in the forest next to Remorse Way."

Listening carefully, I can hear in the distance the sound of goods being brought in from the continental port. I can make out the shadows of ships moving through the sky, and there's probably also the echo of Naruze and Naito as well as the rest of them clamoring in the skies. So I think I'm fine, but for now...

...When I come out into the next road, I'll try walking towards the Academy.

And after handing this package over to Toori, I'll investigate Remorse Way.

So Masazumi thought.

However...

...Where's the road?

In her panicked thoughts, there existed the fear about being spirited away; but there existed also a strange feeling of expectation.

And that was...

"I wonder if I'll figure something out if I investigate Remorse Way."

Just like the female shopkeeper said, just like Sakai said, if I investigate Remorse Way, will I be able to understand what lies within everyone?

I wonder. Masazumi ran her gaze through the cracks in the walls of branches and leaves as well as those between the trees, and as she did...

Masazumi came out into a small garden built within the forest.

"Oh."

I raised my voice into the air. The open space was an earthen square tens of meters in length. There was a small house, a place of repose, and there were

children playing in the open plain. On a wooden bench next to them, there were also several parents that had accompanied their children here. Looking around, there was a small path to the stern; but that seemed to be the proper entrance.

...This is...

This is the first time I've come here, but I remember seeing the roof of this place of rest from one of the Academy's windows.

"I didn't mistake the road?"

Sighing once, Masazumi looked from the place she had left to the building that was the place of repose.

It was a building whose interior took up a large amount of space. Coming from the entrance, it had one room, and further inside there was a room with beds and a large window. Figures of people could be seen in the entrance, and in the interior that carried a tinge of evening shadow; but the atmosphere was...

...like that of a conference room.

Thinking this, Masazumi halted her gaze on a plaque stuck to the wall of the place of rest. The metal engraving indicated: " 'May the spirits find repose' 1618..."

"Something for the repose of souls, then?" Masazumi judged. If it were thirty years ago, then Mikawa and its surroundings would still be busy and the insurrection that used Catholic spells against the government oppression and the resulting battles that were occurring everywhere in the Far East would have been ongoing.

I had heard that while still young, Lord Motonobu had suppressed those insurrections and secured his place as the head of the family.

"Something from that time, then? ...It was left here even after Musashi's renovation."

She drew a breath.

Masazumi saw the directional sign pointing towards the forest, where it was written: "Forward Way".

"I wonder if there're many reposiums around here?"

Looking at the light coming from Remorse Way, just beyond the trees, Masazumi stepped into the forest again.

Remorse Way.

I have a vague idea of why that place is called Remorse Way.

“If you descend from the Academy and walk the road for a while, there’s a stone slab to the side. The words inscribed on it are: ‘1638 All those who reside in Musashi pray for the girl, Horizon A’s happiness in her next life,’ huh.”

Thinking about it now, doesn’t it seem like that’s related to the name Remorse Way?

Regret always follows loss. That also applies to me. When my mother disappeared...

...I should have done that... I should have done this...

I regretted.

On that day, when I went to the Academy, I said that I would be back; but I don’t remember an answer. Whether it couldn’t be heard or whether I couldn’t hear my mother’s answer, I don’t know. It might be that my mother disappeared in that time, ever so slight though it was.

Masazumi thought. A regret the same as hers had created that stone slab and the place of repose that held the name of a reposium, and it had left those things behind.

If that was so, that girl is the embodiment of the remorse of Remorse Way.

Wondering about it, Masazumi took a breath, stopping in order to inhale the forest air.

At that moment.

“—”

Suddenly, a voice could be heard from outside.

The voice was a voice of song that echoed from afar.

A voice that sang the Song of Passage melody.

•

Masazumi knew who was singing the Song of Passage. It was a voice she had heard in the morning and just before noon.

“P-01s?”

Morning, just before noon, and afternoon. There were times when business was a little slow, so she would always sing every so often. As for today, now was the time for the afternoon song.

Behind her, the voices of the playing children could be heard coming from the park.

Masazumi heard both the voice of song and the voices of playing as they mingled together; and she turned her gaze toward the stern of the ship, where it could be heard the Song of Passage was coming from.

...Today, it feels like I'm hearing her voice really often.

It's been one year since both P-01s and I have come to Musashi. However, if I think about our relationship, it's only the relationship between one of the staff members of a café and a student that is one of the customers. Yet, I'm able to understand what she does every day...

...Comparing the situation now with the past, we've started to talk quite often. About borrowing books and the like.

I also talked about my mother, and today I also told her about my body; though it's more like that spilled out.

It's probably a one-sided feeling, but it's certain that she's someone with whom that I can talk about things like that.

We've both lost and been deprived of things, and for the both of us there are things that we have been able to gain in Musashi, the place we've come to.

“...I wonder if it would be fine for me to say that we're friends?”

The words she muttered only because she was alone were left hanging in the air, and Masazumi once more set forth, walking forwards.

Stepping on the grass, setting her sights on the scenery and light that poked

through the gaps of the trees...

“__”

She immediately came out onto the road. The scent of leaves and wood hung thinly in the air.

Turning around to look, the shadowy forest where she had been walking and the place of rest she had just seen were silently existing beyond the branches and leaves. However, the forest was dimly lit.

I walked a pretty long way, she thought.

...So it really is a place for the repose of spirits? From outside, it really looks like a quiet place.

Well it's evening, the kids playing there must have gone home, Masazumi thought.

And as she did...

Suddenly, a voice called out to her from the street behind her. It was coming from a relatively high place. It was the voice of a man, ringing out from the window of a carriage stopped in the road.

“What on Earth are you doing in a place like this, Masazumi?”

The voice I can hear is one I am well acquainted with. However, for me, it is a voice that makes me cower.

It is the voice of a person who was unable to answer my hopes, in a time long past.

He left my mother and I, and even though he called me to Musashi...

...This person did not even meet with me often.

It is the voice of my father.

•

Under the afternoon sky, the scene of a meeting set in Remorse Way, a meeting between a carriage and a student came into being.

There was a gaze that watched it from afar. The owners of that gaze were

sitting on the steps to the Academy: the female teacher with a sake bottle under her arm and the long-haired girl giving the teacher a manicure. The two of them looked at both the student in uniform and the carriage.

“—Masazumi’s gotten out. It seems like she’s talking to the people in the carriage, though.”

“Hehehe, Sensei, why is it that there’s seaweed in the gaps of your nails?”

“That’s simple. Aren’t there sometimes times when you don’t have chopsticks? With that, what you need is courage and decisiveness.”

Rather than that...

“Isn’t that strange? Over there and over here...”

Oriotorai jutted her chin forward, pointing something out.

What she was indicating as “strange” was Masazumi, who was facing the carriage, a serious expression on her face as she stood unmoving. But that wasn’t all.

“Toori...”

Toori, who was sitting atop a streetlight, was staring into the distance.

Just like the two, he was looking at Masazumi, staying completely still.

He was staring.

•

Behind Masazumi, to the direction where she turned, there stood a carriage.

Drawn by two horses, it could hold six passengers, with the benches facing one another inside each able to seat three people. Through the opened window, a single man was on the middle of the bench to the back of the carriage. The black-haired man, body clad in western clothing, lightly held up his hand to silence the men sitting across from him.

“What are you doing here?”

Masazumi felt her body contract at those words, directed towards her though their owner was not looking at her.

I'm shrinking from him.

Masazumi herself understood this. She knew the reason for this clearly as well.

However, this is not the time nor place to wither away. In the interior of the carriage, where I can barely see through the window, opposite to Father there is a member of Musashi's provisional council as well as an executive from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. In Okutama there are many businesses that were started personally or as part of clubs, not to mention unions.

Therefore, Masazumi spoke.

“—There are still many things I do not know about Musashi, so I was surveying the area.”

I'm speaking like I'm trying to earn myself points, she thought. And if things went as normal...

...I see. It was his pattern to leave me silently, only the echo of that statement in his eyes giving any form of acknowledgement.

However, something different came to pass.

“Is there anything you've found out about the reposium inside the forest you've just come out from?”

“Eh...?”

There was some surprise at receiving a response from her father, but what Masazumi reacted to was what he had actually said. The words that her father had spoken to her could be thought to be merely lip service for the sake of his appearance, but all she could say at that point was: “—Um, is there something about that resting place?”

If my father knows something, I'd like to ask. However...

“You haven't studied enough. It's shameful that you don't know a single thing.”

Spoken to in that manner, their gazes never meeting, Masazumi felt herself start to frown.

Concerning the condition of the parent-child relationship between her father and herself, “unclear” would be the best description. It could probably be concluded as bad, but they had never clashed to the point where one could clearly say that, nor had they ever conversed.

...However, when Mother disappeared, this person...

He didn't come to Mother's funeral for her supposed death. In his place a messenger came, and I was encouraged to move to Musashi.

I told my father about wanting to attend the Academy as a person desiring to be a politician on Musashi.

The voice that answered me said this:

“What are you saying? —Turn your eyes elsewhere, away from being a politician on Musashi.”

...Do you not care about me?

That was the first time I had thought this.

One year has passed since then. He doesn't meet my gaze, and we don't speak often. And as for now? I wouldn't be ignored when he's in front of his clients, would I? He wouldn't respond by saying that he doesn't care, would he?

Therefore, now, Masazumi tried to say something.

...Not enough study?

Today, I was told something similar to what the café's female shopkeeper and Sakai told me. I know that I haven't studied enough. Not knowing about Musashi, not knowing about the people in the same class as I, I know that I'm unable to match my father, who has already reached that position. However...

...I haven't forgotten to learn.

I want to say that. Yet, how should I say it?

Not knowing this, a smoldering heat was born in her stomach.

Simultaneously, a voice spoke from within the carriage.

“—Be that as it may, my dear, you are carrying something quite strange.”

Eh? Masazumi looked at the small package clutched under her left arm.

...Why's he interested in this landmine-like thing—!

“My business transactions also deal with that kind of thing. It is a first edition copy, making it even more rare.”

“Ah, no, this is, um, a friend's...”

Masazumi tried to follow up with an explanation, but her father's voice rang out, stifling hers.

“I don't really understand, but...give it to me.”

Masazumi gulped down a breath.

...That's impossible.

I can't do that. This isn't mine. It's something that annoys me, and I don't want to carry it, but I can't.

Yet, Masazumi thought this.

She thought that this was a transaction.

If I show integrity, their impression of me will be good; and this impression will continue into the future. If I resist, I will be treated as if I am still a child. However...

“If it's a friend's, then buy one after this and send it to him. He won't notice.”

The other side of the transaction had even prepared an escape route.

If I do not give it to him, the clients will take that as my father's shame and I will be seen as a person whose will is difficult to bend.

If I give it to him, my father will be able to show his clients evidence that he can make me do things according to his will, and it will give the indication that I hold no position other than the one of a submissive servant.

If I desire to be a politician, then what I am to do is completely within my grasp.

So Masazumi thought.

However, she thought that there was something that she had to keep.

And that something was this.

Even if I am trying to become a politician like my father...

...I don't want to become like him.

In spite of this...

“Masazumi.”

A voice could be heard. This was the final decision. As a hopeful politician before the people who hold power in Musashi, what choice should she make? Her father was chasing her towards a rushed judgement.

“——”

She didn't know. Even not knowing, Masazumi thought to follow her heart. She thought to let herself speak what she wished, leaving it to her own judgment. She thought that that was her heart's true decision.

It was at that moment that suddenly a voice came flying at her from her right. It was the voice of a boy.

“Alright, Seijun, nice job~~!!”

•

Along with that voice, a gust of wind blew from the right.

A boy whose brown hair would shake with every step. He pranced lightly between the carriage and I.

“You brought that for me, didn't you!!”

He snatched the package under my arm from me, as if he was robbing me of it.

“Ah!” As I turned to look at him, my voice spilling out, he had already twirled around, the chains decorating his clothes clinking, and was trying to head back the way he had come.

He entered the space between the carriage and I, still stepping about as if he was dancing.

“Thanks. I have to play the games that've just been piling up all of tonight, but

Naruze and Naito didn't bring me this and were just flying around; so I was wandering around without thinking~”

“Aoi...?”

There was one reason that the voice that called out to him was a question. His face had changed to the point that it could be seen just by looking at him.

“You really don't look well, you know...? Are you alright? Did something happen?”

Toori's smiling face was oozing sweat; but yet, he took a deep breath, and after a moment...

“Don't worry about it! It's just that I ran a little!”

As he spoke, he lurched towards the Academy.

“You've probably heard this from president Sakai, but will you be coming tonight? Tomorrow I'm going to confess to the girl I'm in love with, so we're having a party at the Academy the night before.”

“Y-you idiot, what's with that all of a sudden?”

There has to be a limit to a changing of topics. Let alone for the fact that they were in front of Masazumi's father and his clientele, for some reason, Masazumi could feel heat rising to her cheeks. Still steaming with the annoyance that she was blushing, she frowned.

“Like I'd go. It's a violation of school rules. About that...”

Masazumi recalled Lord Motonobu's greeting at noon. According to that...

“Tonight it seems like they'll be having fireworks in Mikawa. Since that's happening, and we'll only be able to see it from the sterns of every ship, there's no restriction on movements between ships tonight... If I'm going anywhere, that's where I'll go.”

“I see. Well, I wanted you to come if you could.”

“Huh? Why?”

Masazumi asked. Toori looked over his shoulder at her. However, his face looking at her from the right was stained with shadow from the sun in the west,

to his left. As such, Masazumi could not make out his facial features clearly.

All she could do was listen to his voice, which remained audible.

“—The person I’m confessing to is someone Seijun knows well.”

“Huh? W-wait a minute! ...You aren’t going to cause any trouble for me, are you!? Are you!?”

“I wonder about that~” Toori started to run, weaving around.

“Don’t do anything embarrassing, alright!? Really, definitely don’t do anything like that, alright!?”

So she said; but as Toori ran away, all he did was wave his hand.

“Really,” Masazumi muttered. Suddenly, she realized the situation she was currently in. Panicked, she dipped her head towards the wagon.

“I-I am very sorry...”

“Not at all.”

The answer came from her father’s business partner. He folded his arms and nodded deeply.

“To think that the Master of Remorse Way would come here... —It’s been a good 10 years, hasn’t it?”

“The Master of Remorse Way...?”

Masazumi asked. The business partner looked at her out of the corner of his eye.

He nodded, dipping his face slightly.

“You should take a look there.”

Having been told this, Masazumi looked at the pedestrian paving on the opposite side. Below the thick shadow born from the afternoon light, there stood a single stone slab.

That stone slab was...

“Earlier, a girl died in an accident here. It wasn’t publicized.”

“That stone slab...belongs to the girl Horizon A, doesn’t it?”

“Judge, that is correct. Horizon A. Short for... Horizon Ariadust.”

Masazumi held her breath as the words of that voice, spoken whilst facing downwards, reached her ears.

She could see Toori as he met up with her sister and the others. She could see that his sister was embracing him as he hung his head, devoid of energy.

“Isn’t Ariadust the name of the Academy...?”

“In the beginning, around twenty years ago when Lord Motonobu became the leader of Mikawa, he read the Matsudaira’s family name backwards, further erasing the last syllable in the name so as to show his allegiance to the Testament Union. From MATSUDAIRA, ARIADUST was born. He said that the protection of the name Matsudaira was no longer needful.”

A breath.

“Of course, the Testament Union acknowledged Lord Motonobu’s will and returned the name to its former spelling; but that name still remained in several places. The Academy is one such example, and the child who used that name was...”

Masazumi’s father spoke thus, as if to steal the business partner’s words out of his mouth.

“Have you not heard of this? —Lord Motonobu of Mikawa had a wife and child by common marriage.”

And regarding that.

“The child’s name was Horizon Ariadust... Remember it, so you can rid yourself of this lack of study.”

•

“__”

All words fled from Masazumi’s mind at this sudden declaration.

However, at that point everything did not just come to an end. Her father’s voice continued to speak out.

“The carriage that was involved with Lady Horizon’s accident was Lord

Motonobu's carriage. It was headed towards the ceremony to dedicate the renovation of Musashi. Her body was recovered by the Matsudaira family, but no inheritances were forthcoming. This is a story not meant to be spoken of publicly. Tomorrow, it will be exactly a decade since that day."

"A decade..."

"A thing of the past." Her father's business partner lowered his eyes and muttered those words.

"However, for the Master of Remorse Way, the remorse probably continues in real time. Because if you look merely at the outcome, he killed Lady Horizon."

"Huh...? What do you mean by that? He killed her?"

Masazumi frowned. However, when she looked inside the carriage, the business partner was shaking his head.

It was a gesture that expressed how he could not tell her.

Therefore, Masazumi spoke. If she could not directly ask what happened with Aoi here...

"Then, you cannot mean that the Master of Remorse Way is..."

Those words formed themselves into a whisper, spilling out. That which the female shopkeeper had said, that which Sakai had said...step into the midst of everyone, and *know*. The secret the people of Musashi kept.

"The remorse of Aoi 'Toori'^[17]. Wordplay using double-entendre to make the words Remorse Way..."

"Judge," that short answer was all her father said. His business partner laced his fingers together.

"He was also injured, and was immediately taken to Mikawa with Lady Horizon by carriage. Yet he was the only one to return from Mikawa, treated and sleeping from anesthetics. After that...what remained was an unending remorse."

Ah..., Masazumi thought. I've had that kind of regret before. The time nearly ten years ago when I learned that I was unable to inherit a name; and one year ago, when I comprehended that I had lost my mother.

...Regret is carved into my body.

“But, why...”

Masazumi thought thus.

The Aoi that lost that girl ten years ago doesn't seem to match up with the Aoi of today.

I have experienced regret, so I understand. However, Aoi is different from me. And that was...

...Why can he smile? Why can he confess? Why can he play around at night?

This wasn't something that you could conclude just by saying that it's because he worships a God of Entertainment. Thinking about it simply, you could come to the conclusion that it was just because he's irresponsible; but if that was the case...

...despite the fact that everyone knows this, why do they continue to support him?

He's called “Impossible”, his physical ability is low due to his injuries, and he's talentless; but yet he's the man who was elected to be both the chancellor and student council president. Even if supported by the Testament Union, maintaining your status requires the support of the populace. And the people, whether it be that female shopkeeper or his classmates, no matter who it was... they did not hate that idiotic Aoi.

...Why was that?

He laughed like he had forgotten his past regret. He looked like he was utterly carefree.

“Why does everyone support him...?”

I don't know. I investigated Remorse Way, but it feels like the puzzles are just coming one after the other.

And there's no way to know the answer but one.

“—Are you willing to step into it, Masazumi? The place where his remorse goes?”

In response to her father's words, Masazumi started and turned back.
However...

"We will be late to our meeting... This is all for now."

The carriage started to move as he spoke.

In the blink of an eye, the carriage headed off towards the Academy.
Following it with her gaze, Masazumi saw that Aoi and his sister were no longer
under the Academy's stairway.

"I've been left behind."

That thought rose unbidden in my heart.

I know only a single fact.

...That I know nothing at all.

Chapter 13: The Authorities at the Rendezvous Point

CHAPTER 13

"The Authorities at the Rendezvous Point"



Even if you are one with power.
What do you have to do.
To stand in a person's ground.
Point Allocation (Overlooking)

Even if you are one with power

What do you have to do

To stand in a person's ground

Point Allocation (Overlooking)

•

The sky started to turn from the color of afternoon to that of evening.

At this time the sky's blue lightly loses its hue, becoming a color not quite described by aquamarine or yellow.

Below that particular sky, there existed a town with a vast, flat surface at its center.

In the town, the wooden surface spread out as if hammered flat. Its four walls and surroundings all showed the following display: "NEW NAGOYA CASTLE ATELIER of MATSUDAIRA."

New Nagoya Castle. The colossal workshop that occupied the majority of Mikawa's streets.

However, at every entrance to the workshop and every cargo loading door automatons armed for security stood unmoving. Machines were everywhere.

Conversely, there were no people anywhere.

Between the workshop and town there lay a moat. And on the other side of the moat, there were also automatons patrolling and cleaning the roads of the town; but the majority of the town was devoid of humans. The entrances and shutters to the majority of the houses were closed.

And now, two figures were walking the streets where the long shadows of the houses lay.

They were Sakai and Sakakibara.

Sakakibara was walking ahead; but the one who did most of the talking was Sakai, who followed Sakakibara from behind.

"—So, in our Academy, it seems like there's people who took names. Like Naomasa, and there's Neshinbara, that you get if you take out one of the things

in your name^[18]. ...Also, are we going to your new place? I never come this far, since I always finish my business at the checkpoint. This place's changed quite a lot too. The canal that everyone threw you in after you kept on complaining that it was hot that one summer was around here, wasn't it?"

"That canal was buried because of the construction of New Nagoya Castle; I took the initiative to take command of that particular project."

"Then, this was the place? Stop stepping all over my memories. You're a horrible man."

Sakai spoke. Uncaring of the fact that Sakakibara had hunched his shoulders up in anger and was walking quicker, he looked around the area while whistling.

His roaming gaze looked over the automatons that were maintaining the grounds and the walls of the road. Every one of them was...

"...I thought they were simply cleaning, but this... Words of blood due to the phenomena are pretty common, aren't they? Like things from beyond, the holes in the floor; those were caused by claws, weren't they?"

"Many things are coming out here, and not just things that had happened in past records. After this year began, the frequency and type suddenly increased. One night, black figures lined up and marched around the town. We think that it was one type of night wandering. Carriages drawn by headless horses, things that cannot be seen but whose footsteps can be heard...words of blood appearing on the wall and floor happens every day this year. That's why I don't go outside at night. It seems that Honda-kun does differently, though."

"Does Da-chan still like that kind of thing like he did before? —Well, how's the town's defenses?"

"The Atsuta Shrine's barrier is still effective when it comes to the houses. They need something on the level of a vital point, though."

"Isn't that for the use of a castle?" Sakai shrugged. In response, Sakakibara mirrored the movement.

"Well, the Atsuta style specializes in battle."

So he said before suddenly looking up to the sky.

The sky's color had faded, becoming thin, and there was the outline of a ship in the western reaches.

Sakakibara said this concerning the rectangular black ship:

"...Immediately after the ship of the Pope-Chancellor, that Tres España's ship has come. They most likely plan to switch places with Honda-kun's daughter's advance ship and land in the port. That's..."

"It's Tres España's Kraken class Inquisition warship. In essence, Tres España's special squadron, well versed even against monsters. They transport the Andamio de la Ejecución, able to perform ether decomposition even on earth dragon levels. By showing it off, they display the measure of their power. Though it may be in a territory where P.A. Oda's power extends, if there's any incident, they will act without mercy."

Outlined in black by the light shining behind it, the bottom of its stern carried a massive battle platform.

Seeing that, Sakai heaved a sigh.

"The user of the Logismoi Óplo should be riding inside that. That would be because Tres España's user of the Logismoi Óplo, one of the Eight Great Dragon Kings, Tachibana Muneshige was the vice squadron leader of the the Inquisition squad. Maybe to escort the Pope-Chancellor? This is really bad...two of the Dragon Kings coming here? It's almost like this is a war-torn territory."

"Well, no continental port bars like the one in the outskirts are currently in operation, so they won't be coming here. They've probably come here to hinder us while showing their forced loyalty to the Pope-Chancellor. Tres España, being the great power that it is, won't have any plans of giving K.P.A. Italia, who wants to come back from the ashes, a new Logismoi Óplo, will they?"

"I see."

So Sakai spoke. He looked at New Nagoya Castle, its flat shadow coming into view.

"Mikawa's this popular with every country, but needless to say, no countries can have any exchanges with Musashi, huh. With the clearing out of the populace and the many phenomena, there isn't anybody here — Is that really

alright?”

“If I said that it was?”

“—I’d say: ‘You can’t be hiding something strange that you’re doing, can you?’”

He took a breath.

“Our students said this. It’s true that the flow of goods from Mikawa is strange. ‘It seems like they’re distributing mementos,’ I think they said — What’s going on with Mikawa right now? What are you thinking?”

Starting up his feet again, that had stopped at some point, Sakai asked. Sakakibara had stopped as well. Tapping him on the shoulder, Sakai hurried him to start walking.

“What’s wrong with Ii? He was in charge of politics and innovation, wasn’t he? I want to hear his response...”

“He was spirited away.”

Suddenly yet softly, he said this.

“Do you know of the person who’s said to have started these spiriting away cases...the ‘Princess’?”

•

Beneath the sky where the sun was starting to set, Sakai and Sakakibara continued to walk. And as they did, Sakai asked Sakakibara a question in return.

“Ii’s spiriting away...and the Princess?”

“Have you heard about it? It’s an existence that started to be spoken of around thirty years ago. At that time, it spread around as an urban legend amongst the children; but more recently, it seems that it’s been spreading around a little more.”

“Then or now, if it’s among the children’s generation, then it’s way out of my jurisdiction.”

Sakai smiled wryly while saying this.

“This ‘Princess’ refers to the daughter of the Chinese royal family... And if I

know about the Princess Disappearances, then it follows that I'd know about it. Even recently, Musashi's Asama and Masazumi have been involved with it. When Masazumi transferred to Musashi, her mother had been a victim of a Princess Disappearance; and there's a mention of it amongst the phenomena Asama occasionally talks about."

"Judge, I see. Then, this will be quick."

With that, Sakakibara cleared his throat.

"Let me say one thing in advance. Now, Mikawa is extremely different from what it was when you were here."

Also...

"Please try to hunt down the Princess. For the sake of learning everything."

"The Princess...?"

"Judge. I'm talking about the person who's leaving the words of blood and carrying out the most spiriting away amongst all the other phenomena. I don't know who chose this name, but we call them 'Princess' or even 'Princesses'. Well, according to rumor their true identity is that of a noble's illegitimate child, or that the perpetrator's actual name is Koushu Tachi^[19]. There are many other explanations."

"Wait..."

Bathing in the wind that had started to blow through the town, Sakai asked a question to Sakakibara's back as Sakakibara walked ahead of him.

"Why do you know that someone like that exists? Weren't the Princess Disappearances a type of spiriting away?"

"When Li-kun's whereabouts became unknown, there was something in the study where he was supposed to be."

Sakai watched as Sakakibara looked back, even while walking.

However, he couldn't see Sakakibara's expression. His face had fallen into shadow due to the sun's light from the mountains.

Sakai listened to Sakakibara's voice, which could still be heard though his face

remained wreathed in shadow.

“ ‘Playtime is over’ was written on the sliding screen of the study from where li-kun disappeared. The inkstone and pen that he would have been using up till that point were left as they were. The paper he had opened up was untouched.”

“...And the perpetrator? If the perpetrator was there, the guard automatons must have seen someone, right?”

“Isn’t passing through automatons’ defense a simple thing for you and I? Also, li-kun’s study was slightly apart from his main mansion. Even the automatons patrolling the gardens have blind spots.”

A wry smile.

“The Lord said that: ‘It’s because li’s naive.’ Now, I think that way as well.”

Sakakibara suddenly stopped.

However, he was still making noise. It came from his feet. The sound was of Sakakibara drawing a diagram in the sand with the toe of his grass slippers.

What he drew was a circle with a line crossing horizontally through it.

“—This is called the Double Border Crest. A double boundary line formed by the boundary line of the circle as well as the boundary line piercing it. When the Princess appeared, it was a symbol they always left behind. It was also found in li-kun’s study.”

He drew a breath.

Once again, Sakakibara turned to face forward.

Once again, he started to walk.

Once again, all Sakai could see was his back.

“The Princesses exist. To be honest, I didn’t believe it myself, but...the people who follow the incidents of spiring away as well as the other phenomena should have noticed its existence. The existence of the symbol that is always left behind by this phenomena.”

“Do you know about this?”

Sakakibara asked.

“li-kun told me about it. The Princesses are trying to save the world by kidnapping people, giving the world a warning. And every time...they intentionally finish with a symbol.”

Having been told this, Sakai noticed something. The automatons were wiping off letters of blood from everywhere in town, but...

...Were there any among them that were written by the Princess?

The phenomena don't exhibit any kind of clear will, and it's rare that they have any kind of continuity. However, the Princess Disappearances have that trait. If the Princesses that Sakakibara had spoke of further were a part of this...

...They're an organization?

In this age, organizations are limited to faiths and Academies. Judging from the name "Princess" they should be related to China, specifically the Far East; but there are kingdoms in Europe as well, so if you think of the lords there as "Princesses", the possibilities suddenly widen. So, I shouldn't be asking about the country, but I should be asking...

“Who...are they? Are they people from some Academy or faith? How are they related to the current situation in Mikawa!?”

“I plan on giving those materials to you.”

Sakakibara's feet halted.

In front of him there stood a single residence. A mansion surrounded by a bamboo fence.

In front of the small gate, Sakakibara raised his right hand slightly.

“There's a teashop over there. It's a shop run by the automatons that control my district. I'll have them bring the documents there at 8:30. Please wait a little bit.”

“Hey, c'mon, let me wait inside your house.”

“—My house is in the same neighborhood as Honda-kun's, you know? It seems that Honda-kun doesn't want to talk to you about li-kun... I think he

doesn't want to make you worry."

"So that means that you want to make me worry? ...You're a disgusting man."

Sakakibara did not immediately respond to those words. He stayed silent for a few moments, eventually smiling and lifting his head.

"I don't want the Four Heavenly Kings to lose a comrade."

"Yeah, that's right," he said. His tone lightened, as if to change the topic.

"This is a little off-topic, but regarding P-01s, who you asked about earlier...it's just like what you think."

"If that's so..."

Sakai inhaled, tensing his body. Sakakibara waved his hand at him lightly.

He started by saying, "You're getting ahead of yourself."

"The Lord will tell you the reasoning tonight. Please wait for that."

"Tonight... Mikawa is celebrating with fireworks, right?"

"Judge."

Sakakibara nodded.

"It will be an interesting festival. I've only till it starts to go home, so please wait at the teashop there. I'll have the automatons bring the documents over."

"Then...we part here?"

Sakai asked.

Sakakibara smiled. It felt like he smiled.

Shoulders trembling from suppressed emotion, Sakakibara lowered his right hand, cast in shadow due to the light behind it.

"This isn't a parting—we are the Matsudaira Four Heavenly Kings. I believe that we, li-kun included, are always together."

•

A ship traversed the sky.

As if in answer, another ship came.

This location was southwest of Mikawa, in the skies close to the open-air continental port meant for common-usage. The wooden ship of the security squad, boasting Musashi Ariadust Academy's school emblem on its sides, was headed towards the west. In its place, a black rectangular ship marked with the emblem of Tres España's Alcalá de Henares, representing that country's emblem, came.

The two ships took a course that would take them past each other's right side, heading towards their respective destinations with great turns.

The wooden ship took a trajectory that rose up and to the west. The black ship took a trajectory that descended down towards Mikawa's continental port.

The rectangular black ship lowered its altitude. It had kept the Andamio de la Ejecución, which was like a folded scaffold, below the prow. There were several figures riding atop the black deck, but the majority of them were sailors signalling and running final checks for their arrival at the port.

Close to the prow, on the part of the deck further forward where they worked, there was a boy and a girl.

The girl was short and the boy was tall. The girl had black hair and the boy was blonde. The girl was looking towards the continental port with the binoculars she was holding in her prosthetic arms.

Both of them were clad in the uniforms of Tres España, and they were wearing the school emblem that signified that they were past their third year.

In the midst of the gentle wind, they felt the sunlight of the afternoon's end as it streamed towards them from the west. As they did this, the boy lightly dipped his blonde head towards the nearby sailors. The ends of his eyebrows curved downwards as he smiled.

"I'm sorry for disturbing your work."

He said, and the sailors smiled back at him while continuing their work.

"When Muneshige, the vice squadron leader, goes to a place all can see, the attitudes of the ships around are different—after all, you're one of the Eight Great Dragon Kings, Muneshige-san, able to wield the Logismoí Óplo and hold your own against the Papa Schola."

“My Lypē Katathlipse is just one of the two given to Tres España. Its relative priority has fallen compared to the one that the Pope-Chancellor carries, Stithos Porneia, so whether or not it would go through if I were to fight him is unclear.”

Still looking through her binoculars, the girl said this in response to his self-deprecating words.

“Muneshige-sama, please refrain from treating the Tachibana name as something for show. You, the ‘Peerless in the West’, have the skill to make up for the difference in weapons; and your double inheritance of the names Garcia and Tachibana means—”

“Tes, I understand, Gin-san. I was just talking about our weapons.”

She took a breath, pulling her face away from the binoculars in response to his words. Hanging the binoculars around her neck, she looked at Musashi’s advance ship. It flew the skies to the west of them, leaving.

“It seems that the daughter of the ‘Peerless in the East’, Honda Tadakatsu, was riding that advance ship.”

“I’ve never met either of them, but I wonder if Honda-sama is thinking of passing on his name to his daughter.”

“I wonder. When you think about it, it is a bit of a waste.”

Speaking those words, Gin narrowed her eyes and lightly hugged herself with her two prosthetic arms. While doing this, she looked at Muneshige.

“Please go to a place where you can be seen even from below the ship earlier. If he knew that a user of the Logismoι Óplo had come, the Papa Schola would hurry the production of new Logismoι Óplo made at Mikawa. He will know that he will be unable to do this using brute force.”

“Even though I can’t do anything but fight, I’m used quite often in a political manner.”

“Well.” Gin turned to Muneshige’s back, pushing him towards the prow. Muneshige scratched his head and nodded in acknowledgement as everyone watching the scene unfold gave a small chuckle.

“Yet, the Tsirhc faith places heavy weight on the Commandments. It’s strange

that the leader of the Catholics, the Pope-Chancellor, would come to hurry the manufacturing of the Logismoi Óplo, since they take the deadly sins as their motif.”

“That would be because men are all idiots that want to go: ‘I are super strong!’ ”

“...Gin-san, you say some amazing things once in a while.”

“Yes, I do.”

She did not refute him.

“Well, the Logismoi Óplo are different from the commandments and the Testamenta Arma, which are restricted to a certain area. They are weapons that aim to teach through bad examples, weapons whose usage embody the idea that, ‘humanity’s deadly sins are this terrifying.’ ...They are weapons surrounded by mystery.”

During the latter half of her speech, her tone dipped slightly, becoming low.

No longer being pushed from the back, Muneshige stood on the prow. He turned to look at Gin over his shoulder.

“Gin-san, do you really believe in the rumors surrounding the Logismoi Óplo?”

“Tes. There are some rumors that have raised some doubts. Such as the one that says the Logismoi Óplo are weapons that hold humanity’s deadly sins as their motifs, but the materials for their creation are humans themselves...”

Gin breathed in, the sound tinged with a slight fatigue.

“If possible, I’d like to think that it’s a lie. I don’t want to think that the strength of the Tachibana name is built upon the sacrifice of human lives.”

“Yes... But well, I can understand why such rumors would circulate.”

“Can you?”

Held implicitly within Gin’s gaze was that question. As the end of that gaze, Muneshige was at a loss for a moment. However...

“The deadly sins are things that humanity will always possess. They cannot be separated from us... By a certain definition, it is because they exist that we can

say that we are human. Therefore, it's obvious that it would be thought that to make weapons with the deadly sins as their motif would require humans as raw material. And even if it were true..."

He took a breath.

"It would be a martyrdom to die in order to bring balance to the world as well as to let the world know of the deadly sins, so it was concluded that it was a trivial matter by a conference in the past... Well, I would be one of those to hate it if it were true."

"Tes, all I wanted to hear was what you said last. Also, Muneshige-sama..."

Gin stood within the wind, that had begun to contain the scent of surf. She did not push on Muneshige's back, but supported it.

"...Please don't lose. I'll be able to ignore all the excuses and distrust if you do."

"The Lypē Katathlipse isn't responsible for Kenodoxia (Vainglory) and Hyperēphania (Pride), though."

"It's alright. You would lose if you slack and don't perform at your best, and I would be sad if you lost. So, in order to keep me from being sad, please give your all, Kenodoxia (Vainglory) and Hyperēphania (Pride) included."

"Tes." Muneshige nodded. He looked at the wide continental port, which had come into view as they descended, and the ships anchored there.

He saw the colossal white ship in the midst of them...

"Papa Schola Innocentius is aboard Regno Unito. He's wearing white. And also..."

Beside the white, long robe, there stood a massive crimson frame. It was one of the irregular races, goat horns sprouting from its head.

"The former professor, Galileo the demon. I heard that they restored him as a student in preparation for the Apocalypse. Now, he's K.P.A. Italia's second special duty officer... It seems like everyone wants to show off that 'I are super strong!' "

"No matter how you think about it, I was definitely pushed to stand out here

by Gin-san.”

“That’s within the error range. It’s alright. Tes, because Muneshige-sama is the strongest.”

Saying this, the two looked.

They looked at the man clad in the white robes of clergy, standing there on the deck of Regno Unito, anchored below them.

His black hair rustling in the sea breeze, the man with a slender frame held down his papal hat so that it would not be blown away. His face, past middle age, and crooked smile were directed their way.

Now, the black ship started to heavily turn to the west.

“A ship of the Tsrhc faith cannot look down on the Pope-Chancellor and make port... There’s only space to the south, quite far away from Nagoya.”

“It’d be troublesome if there was an emergency... Well, Lord Motonobu is holding a fireworks festival tonight, or something.”

Taking a breath, Gin looked up to the heavens. Staring at the twin moons that floated in the sky, she said this.

“—A celebration for whom and of what, I wonder...”

•

“Then, everyone. The festival will be starting now.”

A voice echoed through the empty town.

The town, bathed in the crimson remnants of daylight, was devoid of people. That which *was* there was...

“Automatons of Mikawa. Begin your respective activities.”

The automaton announcing this was Kazuno. And around her, things ground into action. Beyond the shadows, several movements set the wind spinning before dispersing and fading away.

Simultaneously. A torii-shaped signframe opened up before Kazuno’s eyes. Displayed on it was...

“Lord Motonobu — It has begun as scheduled. As for New Nagoya Castle’s ley line reactor—”

In the middle of the signframe, Motonobu smiled and nodded. He brought his glasses up to the bridge of his nose.

“Just as scheduled. The celebrations will only be leaked after eight. I’ll leave it to you until then. Tadakatsu is armed and heading towards the first location... But about him, is that really fine with you, Kazuno?”

“Judge. He was able to enjoy himself. Just like ten years ago. I have given a sufficient farewell.”

Saying this, Kazuno dipped her head.

“We do not know what Lord Motonobu is thinking, but as one who serves, I will be together with Tadakatsu-sama; I will protect him, staying with him to the last. You may start whenever you wish—”

She drew a breath. She raised her face, devoid of all expression. The object of her gaze was New Nagoya Castle, the square building that housed four ley line reactors and a unified reactor. She nodded in its direction.

“As the host, please enjoy this. It will be starting now...the last festival of Mikawa, who chose to face the world.”

Chapter 14: Covert Operatives Under the Night Sky

CHAPTER 14

"Covert Operatives Under the Night Sky"



How is the darkness of temptation.
Which makes the night fun.
Seducing you.

Point Allocation (Night Games)

How is the darkness of temptation

Which makes the night fun

Seducing you

Point Allocation (Night Games)

•

There existed light in the depths of darkness.

The light accumulated like particles, each one of them the light of a building or house.

The group of lights formed the shape of a city, which looked out to a bay.

However, the light was scarce.

Furthermore, a gigantic rectangular darkness existed in the middle of the city. The darkness that consumed over half the city extended outwards like a spiderweb, the roads and waterways filled with darkness going every direction.

Even though its center was wrapped in darkness' embrace, several lights continued in various directions from the nighttime town. Those were the lights from the homes and villages in the outskirts that followed the main roads; in other words, the streets and mountain paths.

A voice took form at a place where all this could be seen: the northwestern surface of the mountain.

“Musashi is to the north while Tres España's Inquisition's ship as well as Regno Unito, the ship of the Pope-Chancellor-sama who came to await the new Logismoí Óplo, lie to our west. And to our south is Mikawa, which is making an offering to P.A. Oda.”

The owner of the voice was standing atop a ridge. It was a young man on the roof of a watchtower constructed there. He was wearing the uniform of the main Academy in Tres España, Alcalá de Henares. However, the uniform was modified for mountain use. It was covered with a fabric without pores, meant to protect against the cold.

Sitting in a folding chair, he looked over Mikawa and the mountains leading

there.

His hands, sticking out of the uniform, were holding a sniper rifle. From time to time he would use his scope to look around.

There was a small noise. Something was tapping from within the collar of his uniform.

Without dropping his gaze to look at his collar, he looked at the ridge reaching from the town to the watchtower where he sat.

“—Well done, Gabriel-san.”

He spoke, and a girl opened his collar and crawled out. About three heads tall, she had two wings.

She took a seat on the young man’s shoulder.

“You have a call.”

As soon as she said those words, the girl Gabriel took a trumpet from out of her wings. The trumpet shook.

“—B2T3, this is B1T3. Report your status.”

“B1T3, this is B2T3 responding. Tes, there are no changes in the situation—I just have one complaint.”

He responded.

A voice boomed out from the trumpet.

“That Gabriel you have is really good. My mouse is a symbol type, so its speech patterns are really businesslike.”

“I’m not going to modify it for you, you’re really good.”

“Aren’t you going to strengthen its functionality? The Catholics have started discounting functionality as a measure against the Protestants.”

“It’ll become big if I strengthen its functionality, though. It’s nice when it’s small. Yeah, the fact that it’s small is really good.”

“That’s deep...”

The young man nodded. Atop his shoulder, Gabriel inclined her small head,

tilting it to the side.

“Deep?”

“Yeah, it means that you’re worth a lot.”

Having heard that, Gabriel smiled after a while. B2T3 nodded.

“Man, damn this. I’ll be doing this forever. When I’m done with this job, I’ll turn on its false jamming so we can cuddle. Jealous, aren’t you?”

“There’s no way you’re ever getting married. Also, don’t raise strange death flags. If you’re going to, then at least do it with a 3D person.”

“Rest easy, we’ll be able to head back home the day after, so we just have to sit tight. Well, disregarding the fact that the majority of classes other than the extracurricular ones you chose are canceled, night duty is tough.”

Suddenly, the young man could hear a noise. A high-pitched noise. Along with the noise came a sound close to murmuring.

“Is that a disturbance in the ley lines? Did New Nagoya Castle’s ley line reactor start up for work?”

“Down here, I’ve been able to pick it up for a while. Somehow, it seems like something outside the schedule we were given. A communique came in that said that the higher-ups were going to ask New Nagoya Castle about it before reporting to headquarters.”

B1T3 spoke from the other side of the divine communication.

“Rather than that, did you see the advance ship that switched places with us coming out of the dock? It seems like the girl that’s rumored to be the next inheritor of the Honda name was riding on it.”

“—Never cut anyone before.”

“Are you talking about yourself?”

Having been asked about that, B2T3 gave an answer.

“I’ve shot someone. That was in a little skirmish we had with Hexagone Française. As for killing...only animals. Male students of Tres España always do it during bullfighting lessons.”

Gabriel's eyebrows crinkled and she stared into his face.

"...Sad?"

"Thanks for asking."

"Eh!? Are you talking to me!? Oh damn, how far back is the savepoint I'm going to have to load for this!?"

"Shut up, asshole. Don't disturb Gabriel and I. If you peek out from the watchtower and smirk, It'd probably be my first time killing someone..."

"Hey now, don't stand up. I can see you from here."

Hearing those words, B2T3's body shook.

...Eh?

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing."

...I'm sitting down, though?

The instant that thought ran through his mind, Gabriel lightly tapped his cheek. Directly after, the trumpet shook.

"B2T3, this is B1T1."

A girl's voice rang out. B1T1 was, in short, the internal supervisor of the base of operations at the foot of the mountain B2T3 was on. Because this was an extracurricular by choice, they weren't from the same class; but he recalled the face.

It shouldn't have been a girl.

"B2T3, this is B1T1."

Yet, the calls continued.

"—Is all well?"

•

B2T3 moved in response to the voice he had heard. He threw his sniper rifle to the floor and drew his knife out of the sheath he kept under his uniform.

The sheath was facing downwards, so when he released the clasp, the knife slid into his hand.

Gripping the knife, he ducked low and stepped to the left. He turned to face his back.

...Who was there?

B1T3 had said “Don’t stand up.” That meant that there was someone standing behind him.

...Was something there?

That’s strange. The thought rose to his head. *After all, I was watching the road coming from the base of the mountain. The base of operations at the foot of the mountain is detecting spell-type stealth, so they should be checking for even the slightest reactions.*

How did they bypass the surveillance and come all the way here?

If it’s the type of stealth that blocks all sensory output like the one Musashi uses, they would be able to get up here; but I heard that it requires large scale machinery, so it’s only possible because it’s a ship. It shouldn’t be something that can be adapted to personal use.

To find out why, I need information. And to let my comrades know what’s happening...

“Gabriel, open up a different divine communication, emergency...”

“Error.”

Gabriel shook her head. She was close to tears.

“We cannot establish a connection.”

She was saying that she was unable to connect to other Mouses, the method used for short distance communication; or establish divine communication, used for long distance communication.

This loss of connectivity pointed to two facts.

The first was the suppression of the main base of operations’ watchtower. This was demonstrated by the sealing of the established divine communication,

which relied on the base of operations for functionality.

The second concerned the users of the Mouses' divine communication. In short, his comrades were all unable to use divine communication.

...Which means...

Just a moment ago, B1T3 saw a figure standing on this roof. If that was true, the chances are that the watchtower whose roof I'm standing on has been suppressed as well.

I'm in danger.

Thinking this, B2T3 brought the hand gripping the knife out of his uniform, readying himself.

It was nighttime. His vision had not been given a night vision blessing. The night vision spell he *did* have was used for the scope.

Because of this, B2T3 did not use the center of his vision but his peripheral vision to confirm his surroundings. The edge of the retina is more able to different things in the dark than the middle.

However...

...No one's here?

No one was on the roof.

...What does this mean?

There was a problem. However, he could see no one. Was this all a misunderstanding?

...No.

Even now, Gabriel was shaking atop his shoulder. That meant that her ability to carry out divine communication was being interrupted, leaving her unable to do anything.

B2T3 looked at Gabriel.

...Then...!

He thought, and his next movements showed no hesitation.

Carrying Gabriel, he dropped to the floor.

Lying there, he searched his chest.

Gripped in his hand was a signal flare concealed in his chest. If thrown into the sky, it would flash into light, taking a few seconds to shower down. The light intensity was high, and his comrades at the continental port should notice it as well. Therefore, B2T3 reared up, still clutching Gabriel. Standing on the edge of the roof, he tried to throw the flare above him.

“—!?”

B2T3 saw a figure under him. Not on the floor or the air, but on the wall of the watchtower.

On the surface of the wall, close to the edge of the roof, a figure stood horizontally.

...A woman!?

The instant he thought this...

Her body not moving, the woman rose up to him with movements like a mannequin's.

“—Fuck.”

B2T3 toppled back, trying to throw the flare while keeping Gabriel behind his head.

However, the opposition's movements were faster and stronger.

The woman, clad in the black and white of a serving maid, stretched out her arms, wrapping them around his neck.

He was being embraced from the front.

Clung to in that manner, his body was being pulled off the edge of the roof.

“...!”

Once again, the woman stood on the wall. She had let her body fall backwards, into the empty air.

Since his neck was being gripped, he was being pulled forward and

downward. As such, he lost his balance.

“...!!”

He let the knife in his hand swing wide. It was a forced reversal, meant to sever the hold.

However, his hand felt nothing but the clank of metal. Both the sound and touch was hard. The knife had bounced back.

...What!?

Though she didn't seem to be wearing any protection, the knife had, for some reason, not worked.

Why?

The instant he thought this...

B2T3's body had been drawn all the way forward, and he realized that he was floating in the air.

From a neck hold, he was drawn into a front suplex throw.

Because he had reflexively tried to resist, his body spun in a half-circle. As a result, his head was now facing downwards.

As he fell through the sky, having been thrown out, B2T3 heard a sound. This sound was a voice.

It said this:

“This is the operative in charge of B2T3. I judge that I have reached a satisfying conclusion.”

He looked at the owner of the voice he could hear. The figure in the corner of his vision, who was standing on a wall. It was...

“A Mikawa automaton...!?”

For security use, it was one of those he had seen so many times in the village.

But his shout screamed a question at the fact he had just confirmed.

...Why!?

Two questions filled his mind.

The first question was why the automatons were suppressing the surveillance on Mikawa.

The second question was why the automatons, who expended ether to move, had come here without being detected by the base of operations below.

Yet, the prior “why” was meaningless. After all, automatons exist to listen to their master’s orders. Therefore, the fact that the automatons had come to suppress surveillance meant that...

...Mikawa’s lord had started to rebel against the Testament Union.

The remaining puzzle, how they had slipped through the surveillance, was unknown. However...

“Gabriel! Bring them the information!”

In response to this shout, the angel at the back of his neck readied a camera.

B2T3 heard the click of a picture being taken. However, he heard another noise as well.

It was a voice. The voice of an automaton.

“My apologies. If you fall on your head, you will be injured.”

Speaking to the falling B2T3, the automaton calmly leaped off the wall. The hem of her clothing fluttering, the automaton came to a position to the right of him.

“—I will now turn your body so it is horizontal. Your safety is assured.”

The automaton kicked the wall. Its velocity increased as a result of the recoil from that action.

She let loose a kick.

“Pardon me for this discourtesy.”

The next thing he heard was the sound of a kick jarring his bones.

•

“—So.”

A young voice rang out on the bridge looking up towards the two moons.

The voice came from the bridge that led up to the entrance of the Academy. The bridge that displayed the sign of the Musashi Ariadust Academy.

Because it was night, the light stemmed from the lanterns on the bridge and in the courtyard. And within it Shirojiro, the only one standing, addressed everyone sitting around him.

“Toori hasn’t come yet, but without a doubt he’s wasting our money to prepare. Therefore, let’s consider his feelings and tell some ghost stories before we go on our ‘ghost hunt’ ...For free, of course.”

“Shiro-kun, I’m not really sure if you’re trying to get everyone fired up or speaking from a business point of view...”

Heidi said, frowning. Beside her, Asama raised her hand. Nodding to her, Shirojiro invited her to continue.

Asama nodded.

“Um... I’d like to talk about something, something I can only talk about here. It isn’t a ghost story, but it’s about the recent phenomena that have been happening so often...”

Behind her, the Aoi sister thrust her hands into the air.

“Alright, it’s time for Asama’s super erotic storyiiiiime!”

“Ehhh!? Wha—, Kimi, what are you saying all by your...rather than that, don’t suddenly sit up straight, you guys! Um, Kimi does this kind of thing all the time...”

“Well, I worship the God of Eroticism after all. Specifically the Goddess of Performance, Uzume of Sada.”

Asama was at a loss for words. On the other hand, the Aoi sister thumped Asama on the shoulder with a smile.

“Could it be there’s a priestess here who refuses to do things their God orders?”

“Eh? No, nothing like that... I mean, that’s one of the Goddesses of our shrine.”

“Hehehe, that’s stupid of you. I made my substitution contract at your place, after all. Back then, only women could be involved in rituals, so you came to help me out. We stripped together in the waterfall in the back and—”

“Oohhhwaaahh—!!”

Asama interrupted the Aoi sister with a loud scream. Afterward, she turned towards everyone, and hurriedly said this.

“W-we didn’t do anything weird, alright? Alright!? B-basically, rituals are kept a secret so talking about them is like divulging a God’s personal information, or rather...”

“There were a lot of things we didn’t know, so we used the tools in one hand with the manual in the other. We had to do it three times, I think.”

“D-don’t call tamagushi tools! We didn’t even swing it up and down with one hand, the reason we failed twice was because you wrote weird fake names in the book! Wait, don’t record this, guys!”

“Hurry up and notice that you’re just being toyed with,” everyone muttered. Shirojiro spoke.

“Aoi’s sister, please don’t play with Asama just because you don’t like scary stories.”

“Th-that’s right, he’s right, don’t! Kimi’s so cowardly that she fainted the moment she got into her chair when we went to see a Noh horror play, and she’s trying to hide it with those erotic stories!”

“Yeah. That’s why I’m saying that you should sell me those stories. I’ll pay five times the market price.”

“Y-you’re the worst!”

“Now, now...” Heidi interjected. Furthermore, she said this.

“Yes, yes, Asama-chi. Won’t you continue your story? What do you mean by something that can only be said here?”

“Y-yes, about that...”

Heidi glared at Aoi’s sister who was about to say something again, shutting

her up.

Checking that everyone around had fallen silent, Asama slowly said this.

“The truth is...there’s quite a lot of it.”

Hearing those words, Aoi’s sister started to push up her chest from below, a smile on her face. Once again, Heidi stilled her with a smiling glare.

“Ah, don’t mind us. Think of us like we’re just the background. Just like people watching a fighting game, you shouldn’t care about us even if we’re doing really outrageous stuff.”

“Y-yes. Well, actually... I want everyone to be careful.”

“Of what?”

Asama nodded.

“Recently, amongst the phenomena, the higher-ups in the shrine have started to regard the ‘Princess Disappearances’ as a danger.”

•

Everyone fell silent at the words Asama had said, the “Princess Disappearances”.

However, after a while there was someone who spoke out.

It was Neshinbara.

“—Well, it’s basically an urban legend from long ago, right? It seems like it’s revived recently though. When we were small, the rumors of it happening in Musashi and Mikawa were going around as an urban legend. I did a little personal research on it for use as an idea, since I wanted to be an author.”

Neshinbara was tapping on the keyboard of the armrest attached to his waist. He opened up several signframes in the air.

“When I looked it up, it really was something huge back then. In the library, there were books for children about it. A few books about ‘The Lady Princess’ were published around thirty years ago, though there were none about the ‘Princess Disappearances.’ ”

“Neshinbara, can you explain this for free?”

Neshinbara nodded in response to Shirojiro's urging.

He reversed the view of a number of signframes, showing them to everyone.

"This should be easy to understand. The figure called The Lady Princess kidnaps children and leaves scrawls around town. Sources like the daily newspaper cite this as an actual example."

Neshinbara looked over them all before he turned a signframe to face them.

"Recently in the Far East... One year ago in fact, an incident occurred... Everyone knows about this, right? Honda-kun spoke about this. The reason Honda-kun came to Musashi was because her mother was involved in a 'Princess Disappearance'."

In the midst of the silent group, Kimi covered her ears with her hands and was saying: "Aahhhhhh, ahhhhhhh." In spite of this, Asama, who was sitting beside her, looked directly at Neshinbara and nodded deeply.

She summoned Hanami and displayed a signframe in the air.

"The 'Princess Disappearances' are different from the ordinary phenomena of being spirited away. A normal spiriting away causes a disturbance in the ether that makes up space. Because the people are just going behind the distortion, the people who disappeared haven't actually disappeared. If a spell is used, you can track them down using the existence of that which used to belong to them, either the spirit or body."

"However, the victims of the 'Princess Disappearances'...have all disappeared, never to return. Their soul and body, their possessions...they all disappeared. It's like they came into contact with a destruction-type spell that belong to Testament Signs or Technomagic."

"Yes," Asama said.

"Also, the 'Princess Disappearances' started to occur around thirty years ago. And it seems like several incidents have happened this year. Because of this, this is being said in one part of the shrine: 'Couldn't the 'Princess Disappearances' be an organized chain of murders imitating incidents of spiriting away?' "

She paused for a breath.

Asama looked down, touching the tip of her thumb to her lips.

“Couldn’t it be true that the ‘Princess Disappearances’ aren’t phenomena but a method of killing an organization uses because they fear being found out? And that this method of killing doesn’t even leave behind a body, let alone the life of those they suspect?”

Now, Asama drew a diagram on the bridge with her finger. A circle with a line piercing it horizontally.

“This is the symbol that is always left behind at the scene of a ‘Princess Disappearance’. I myself have seen it several times at the scene of what appears to be a spiriting away. It’s always sealed off, and the search always cut off by the higher ups.”

•

Hearing Asama’s words, everyone grew silent.

However, within that silence, Kimi, who had been covering her ears, spoke with forced bravery as she tried to hide her trembling.

“...Tee...heehee, i-it’s not like that’s definitely the sign of a crime or anything. It could be that they were trying to make some erotic symbol when people came running, so they messed up, right? That must be it, right!? Everyone loves erotic symbols! They love them!”

“There’s no crime organization that’d try to draw that kind of mark after finishing their business!”

Hearing everyone berate her, Kimi covered her ears again. Asama spoke, her manner indicating her approval of the good timing.

“And so, well, that’s starting to happen often. There’s other things happening too, and the higher-ups at the shrine recently issued the order that we weren’t to speak about the phenomena to anyone. That order was mostly directed towards the type of phenomena that would fan the unrest in the world; and the ‘Princess Disappearances’ that we talked about earlier, with the symbol of the Princesses...those are definitely included in that statement.”

Everyone nodded.

Despite this, from within the group one hand rose up. It was Naomasa, who was sitting right next to Asama. She was propping up her left cheek with the prosthetic right arm that she had rested on her knee.

Her body was curled up like that of a cat's.

"I'm from China originally. When ya say 'Princess', yer talking about the girls born into the Chinese royal family, aren't ya?"

"Then, have you heard anything about these 'Princess Disappearances'?"

"In Kantou, the rumor comes up from time to time. Somethin' like...when Qing took control of China, the princess of Ming, who'd managed to run away, used a spell to kill those she had grudges against. Well, I thought that it was just a rumor, but..."

"People really were killed," Naomasa said.

"What doesn't make sense to me is this. If you're talking about princesses, then these disappearances are happening even outside of Qing, right? Asama-chi?"

"It's happening most often in Mikawa and at the edge of Kyou, isn't it?"

"...Wow, we're all the way inside the area of effect, huh. Even if we take care, there's not really anything we can do... I mean, if there's a line of crimes that the organization or whatever it is is drawing, then I think that the magistrates and night watch will be following it. If it's a phenomena, then it doesn't really discriminate between its victims..."

"Hehehe, that's right, it's useless! There's nothing we can do! You hit the nail on the head, Adele!"

Kimi suddenly stood up. She laughed delightedly.

"It's useless! Just like how no matter what an unpopular guy does, it's useless, no matter how much you think about how to deal with an urban legend, it's useless, it's all useless! Hehehe, you unpopular bastards! You! And you!"

"H-hey, Kimi! Stop pointing at Tenzou and Urquiaga! Pointing is a bad omen, so just say their names! Also, it's not like they like being unpopular! These are

qualities they worked hard to earn, so there's nothing they can do! Stop digging it in!"

Ignoring the fact that Tenzou and Urquiaga had fallen to the ground starting to weep, Asama and Kimi continued to talk, their argument heating up.

Completely different from them, Ohiroshiki raised his hand.

"I humbly think that we should slowly think on this urban legend...in any case, I think that it has worked well as a ghost story; so, um, where is everyone else tonight? Like the little kids from the kindergarten here!"

"Cast away all desire that won't lead you to money. Anyway, as for the other people, Masazumi is going to see Mikawa's fireworks from Tama's stern, where she lives. Azuma's late because he's moving, Miriam Poqou can't come, and it's forbidden for Mitotsudaira to leave her house at night. Therefore...all that's left is Toori, who's setting up, but..."

The instant he said this...

"Okay! I'm late! Sorry, sorry!"

Suddenly, the front gate of the school building opened and Toori stuck his face out from inside.

"Were you inside there!?"

Faced with those expressions, he gestured towards the darkness inside the school building, a smile on his face.

"Hurry up and get in! It's dark in here, and super fun!!"

•

Beneath the night sky, sitting on a bench under a building's eave was a single figure. Light shone out from the building behind him.

It was Sakai.

He was sitting in front of a small eatery, on a bamboo bench meant for a short respite.

Placing the teacup whose contents he had drained next to him, he puffed smoke out from the pipe he held in his mouth.

“The second moon also looks beautiful today. The Lord Teacher said that he’d prepared fireworks during his afternoon broadcast, but I don’t even feel like adding any color to the sake... All I’ve got going is a bad feeling.”

Trying to check the time, Sakai peered inside the shop.

No one was inside the tatami room or behind the counter of the fairly narrow shop.

Two automatons wearing aprons were standing in the kitchen; but apart from the sound of boiling water and the periodic washing of chopping boards, no sounds of cooking could be heard.

Sakai glanced at the mini Shinto shrine on the inner wall, which doubled as a clock. In front of the shrine affixed to the wall, a chicken Mouse, the spirit of the God of Time, was wandering around with its chicks.

There were four chicks, so...

“...It’s 8:00.”

Sakakibara said that he would have the documents delivered at 8:30. The checkpoint above will close at 10:00, so I want to head to the entrance of the mountain path by 9:00. If I have the documents, I can bring them home and read them.

Sakai looked at the menu hanging on the wall.

“...You serve a lot of curry here. A kid back at our place, Hassan, really likes it, but you seem to enjoy it as well.”

He said. The automatons in the kitchen looked his way and dipped their heads.

“Judge, we were made by the Houjou.”

“So you were made for the Indian Alliance. Well, do you have any recommendations for something to go with sake?”

“If that is your wish, then this minced curry is suitable. It is made from fresh ingredients just taken from Suruga.”

“Um, it’s fine if it isn’t curry...”

Sakai said. As he spoke, someone tapped him from the back.

“Hm?”

Sakai turned around, and standing in the dark, nighttime street was an automaton dressed like a maid.

The automaton was carrying a bundle of paper in her arms. She offered them to Sakai without expression.

“Sakai-sama, this is for you.”

“Ah, thanks. This is from Sakakibara?”

Sakai took it while rising from his chair. The automaton in the maid uniform nodded.

“Judge, before he went to work, I received an instruction to take what was lying on his table and bring it to you afterward, so I fulfilled it.”

“In other words, he started up a new one. That’s just like him...”

“Is that so?”

Sakai nodded. He recalled something from times long past.

“We called him the ‘Manifesto’. He worshiped a God of Compositions, after all, and he could write with some serious fervor. He could also organize information well. What happened this time was probably all stored neatly in his head, and he wrote it up specifically for my use...”

If Tadakatsu had forbidden him to speak of Ii, all he could do was stay in his house without bringing the materials concerning the ‘Princess’ outside.

...If so.

Sakakibara had spit out a summary onto paper and given it to Sakai.

Sakai flipped through the pages held in his arms. He had thought to look at it after returning to Musashi, but curiosity moved him. His heart saying ‘just a little,’ he flipped through the fairly thick Japanese paper with his finger.

“Has he already established that he has nothing to do with it? Or...”

...has he resolved to drag me into it?

Sakai's words stopped there, as he flipped through the pages. This was because...

"...Blank pages!?"

Sakai stopped, unmoving at the sight of the stack of papers on which nothing was written.

"...Sakai-sama?"

In response to the maid's question, Sakai flipped through a few pages, confirming that they were completely blank.

"—It couldn't be."

Throwing those words to the floor, he started to move. Clutching the *documents* given to him under his right arm...

"What's going on!? No, could it be..."

He broke into a run.

His destination was where the maid-type automaton had come from, Sakakibara's home.

The automaton that he left behind him raised her voice, but he didn't care.

Sakai sped from the the front of the shop into the darkness.

"Sakakibara...!"

Sucking in a breath, he thrust his body forwards, hurtling through the empty nighttime streets.

"What did you find out!?"

Chapter 15: Gathered Friends in the Confined Room

CHAPTER 15

"Gathered Friends in the Confined Room"



Idiots are not cured even if they die.
If even the flux of life, death, and rebirth cannot match them.
Which part of contradiction is that.
Point Allocation (Human Nature)

Idiots are not cured even if they die

If even the flux of life, death, and rebirth cannot match them Which part of contradiction is that

Point Allocation (Human Nature)

•

“We have arrived at the library.”

The three figures nodded in response to those words. They had been following Asama through the dark corridors of the Academy.

One of the figures, Naomasa, was shouldering a meter and a half long wrench used to maintain the interior of the ship. She had a bored look on her face.

“How is it, Asama-chi? We don’t have spirit vision, so unless somethin’ really massive appears, we won’t be able to see it.”

Adele, who had stuck an exorcism charm to the Support Knight’s spear she normally used for practice, also spoke, her voice half a sigh.

“I know, right...? It’d be nice if there were like rapping noises or something else that’s easy to understand...”

The final person, who had started to turn her head left and right after hearing the words “rapping noises”, was Suzu. She shuffled backwards a step, the chip under her shoes clicking on the floor.

“...No, that’s, wa, I-I, scared, sound...no...”

“It’s alright, there is nothing here. Konoha doesn’t see anything strange either.”

Asama pointed at her green eye as she spoke, and both Adele and Suzu’s shoulders sagged with relief. The two drew a breath, but...

“But well, there’s something over there.”

Asama suddenly nocked her bow and sent an arrow flying down the corridor. After a second...

“Alright.”

Asama nodded. Naomasa stayed indifferent and silent, but Adele was panicked and Suzu trembling.

“W-what? What is it? What’s going on!?”

“Ah, please don’t worry about it... It’ll be fine if you stay with me, alright?”

“How am I supposed to calm down!”

Adele’s scream echoed through the hallway.

The word “down” rang through the hallway, echoing back to them.

Hearing this, Naomasa spoke.

“If you shout so much, they’ll come to us. Even if they’re nice and quiet at noon, they start movin’ around at night.”

“N-Nao-san...y-you’re, quite, knowledgeable about this, a-aren’t you?”

“That’s ’cause I head to Asama-chi’s place to play quite a lot. Since you’re a Support Knight, you should’ve brought your mobile shell. You still can’t wear the mobile shell that you inherited from your father? All I ever see is the one that you use for practice, never the real thing.”

“Ah, I’ve finally become able to wear it~ But it’s somehow seriously heavy...it still doesn’t really feel like I’ll be able to make my debut with it yet.”

“I’d like to see it,” Naoamasa said, nodding with interest. Yet once again, she looked around at everyone and spoke.

“...But well, just like in the afternoon, we got ditched by Kimi and now we’re stuck.”

The three answered those words with dry laughter.

“Well, if you include that, tonight’s the ‘ghost hunt’, huh. Asama-chi’s just been shooting all day like it’s some sort of stress relief.”

“Mmm, I wonder. The small ones don’t put up a fight.”

“But still,” Asama said.

“Tomorrow morning, let’s invite everyone to come and intrude. After that, there’ll be the confession until we see them off and go home.”

“What’ll you do after you get home?”

“Who knows?” Asama turned her back to them. Her gaze rested on the sliding door to the library.

“Well, let’s talk about his antics after this and see whether we can view them in some sort of positive light. Also, I want to hear the details about what happened during Suzu-san’s entrance ceremony.”

Asama turned towards the library’s sliding door. As she did, Suzu spoke.

“Ah, um, wa-wait, i-if there’s r-really one there, w-what’re we g-going to do? U-um, g-ghosts, and, l-libraries, i-it happens a lot, in, s-stories. Ms. Oriotorai s-said, that, t-the library...”

“It’s alright. I’ve reflected on my failure the previous year and practiced exterminating monsters. And you saw, right? This year, Toori-kun went with the patrolling class, so the gold bodysuit incident that happened last year isn’t happening again. In short...”

Asama smiled at Suzu. Her lips, curved into a smile, gave color to her words.

“The chance of nothing happening is high. Even if something does happen, I will be able to deal with it without problems. In conclusion, I’ll be able to handle it no matter what. So, please be at ease.”

Having said this, once again Asama turned to the library which had a shrine raised above its entrance.

She put her hands together and bowed once to the shrine above the sliding door. Clapping twice...

“Now then.”

Asama opened the door with a smile.

Inside the library stood two two-legged white clumps.

•

The two clumps 10 meters in front of Asama seemed to be made out of white cloth.

On the surfaces of both of the clumps, there were pictures printed of the

beautiful girl in “Magical (Celtic) Girl Banzok”, that had been recently released in Musashi. Asama knew this character. According to Asama’s knowledge, Banzok said things like...

...“Yes, I will immediately flay the skin off my enemies’ heads. I love live sacrifices too.” And that was the extent of her knowledge. However, the difference in size between the two bodies was large. One was thin, the other was broad. In terms of size...

...One was about the size of a hugging pillow, and the other was around the size of a bedsheet...

And both of them had feet clad in white tights stretching from the bottom.

The two of them wriggled around as they faced each other, breathing heavily. However...

“...”

They looked Asama’s way.

There were two black holes opened in the cloth, around where their eyes would be. Apparently because it had been opened in a hurry, the holes were pierced through the cheek of the beautiful girl printed on the cloth. But then again, Asama didn’t understand the sense of worth.

Still uncomprehending, she stayed completely still, and it was her opponents who started to change.

The slender one. The one whose contents were tight, if one had to pick from the two of them. From its nose...

“—Nn.”

Something crimson dyed the cloth from the inside. It happened with great force, such that the white cloth vibrated even as it turned red. Seeing this, the bedsheet next to him spoke out of worry with the soft voice of a man.

“Are you alright!? Are you alright!?”

“Nn, I’m fine, I’m fine Koni-tan...the iron just came out a bit...”

Asama ignored him.

...Yes, I can't hear anything. Can't hear anything. Nooooope, caaaan't hear anything.

The white sheet and the sheet dyed half red looked her way.

Both of them ran straight towards her, their bodies tucked inside. They were shouting this: "A new sense of worth...!"

Uncaring of their voices, Asama hammered in a shot.

•

A sound that could be nothing other than that of an explosion rang out from the southern side of the building at the front of the courtyard.

Next to the buildings towards the back, a row of people were walking down the first floor corridor on the starboard side. A majority of them were first years. Hearing the sound, they stopped.

"Toori, what did you set up? Does it have to do with money? Or are you going to die?"

"Hey, c'mon Shiro, don't just suspect me all the time. I didn't do anything."

"Is that so? Really? Absolutely? Want to put some money down on that?"

"What!? What's with you!? Are you doubting me agaaaain!?"

Toori thumped the floor with a textbook he had pulled out of nowhere and pointed at Shirojiro with the hand holding it.

"It's aalwaaays, aaaaalways me!! Isn't that stupid!? Really, you just have the bad habit of suspecting other people all the time, huh! Like before, right after I stole some food from your lunchbox, you thought it was me right after! I was seriously sad! Suspect other people for once!"

"...Right, I knew I was correct. But this brain of yours can't be fixed with even with *money*! Is it truly impossible!?"

Heidi came between the two. She looked to Azuma, who was standing behind them, bemused.

"Guys, Azuma-kun's just transferred here and he can't keep up, so let's go back to what we were originally talking about, alright?"

“Can’t be helped,” Shirojiro said, looking at Toori. He spoke again.

“What did you set up? It’s something that’s going to have to be resolved with money, isn’t it!? If it doesn’t end there, I’m going to have to make you sit below the waterfall in front of the Academy and charge a viewing fee, got it!?”

“You really love money, huh. But seriously, I didn’t set anything up! Do you think that I had the time for that today!? I spent the majority of the day mashing the ‘next sentence’ button on the signframe of my eroge, alright!?”

“That half-day you wasted on 2D girls is a half-day that someone desperately desires!”

Heidi tapped Shirojiro on the shoulder. After he turned, she whispered this to him.

“Shhh, don’t get carried away, Shiro-kun. If you do that you’ll get pulled into his pace.”

“Yeah, I was nearly reeled in. I’ve got to be careful or I’ll end up wasting money.”

“H-hey, don’t go off and have a battle plan over there! You guys just have the most horrible atmosphere.”

Just for a moment, Shirojiro looked at the ceiling of the corridor and the dust falling from the vibrations.

“You...really didn’t do anything, did you.”

“Of course! I didn’t do anything! ...I just asked someone to do it for me!”

“Whoooooooooo!?”

Shirojiro turned, his eyes half-closed. Standing half a head taller than Toori, he made to tower over him.

“Listen closely. Who did you ask? It’s someone that will be alright with money, right? Not somebody honest, right? That’s the thing that’s going to hang around the longest. What’re you going to do if something happens? Die?”

“Shiro, if you tell me all that all at once, I’m not going to understand a thing. What should I do?”

“Just talking about the outcome...you pay and then die.”

“Whaaat—!? Why’s the ball rolling in such an unexpected direction!?”

As he was talking, the sound of another explosion resounded from afar. Hearing this, Azuma frowned.

“You really asked them to do a lot...”

“My room’s below, right? I’m thinking it won’t be damaged, but it might be.”

“Yeah,” Azuma nodded at the shaking vibrations.

“Ah, but, Poqou-san’s probably going to get angry. She’ll probably ask what we were doing.”

The moment he spoke. The school shook as a massive roar sounded out from the floor directly above them. There was even the sound of glass breaking.

Also audible amongst this was Naito’s voice.

“Wahaaa—!!”

It was a voice that could have been a scream of either joy or terror. Hearing this, Shirojiro looked up at the ceiling again.

“...Just like I thought; on this, money’s going to be spent.”

“Wow, it’s awesome how your sentence structure was totally flipped! Ah, I’ll do it too! Your sentence structure, it’s awesome; in other words, I—!”

“Yes, yes, yes. Anyway, shouldn’t we go take a look? It seems like it might get pretty dangerous...”

Heidi said. Azuma drew a step back from her. He pointed at the ceiling, which was shaking again from vibrations.

“...Eh? We’re going? ...W-we’ll die, won’t we?”

Hearing those words, the two merchants cast their eyes downwards. Despite this, Toori flashed an idiotic, brilliant smile.

“Well then, leave this place to me and you guys head there! I won’t let anyone through! H-hey, c’mon, the atmosphere’s getting really heavy! Super heavy! If I don’t support the air, this atmosphere’ll really get bad...!”

“Shut up.”

The two merchants hooked their elbows on Toori’s throat, coming from the left and right. Doing this, they dragged him off.

Toori kicked and screamed as he was dragged off.

“Eh!? Ah, hey, y-you guys, you can’t treat people like this! Be more gentle, like a mother’s touch! Like I said, heyheyhey, why’re you drawing targets and points on my back, Auge-chan! Don’t raise the points even more! ...No wait, my face shouldn’t be a hundred points, it should be the committee head! Ah, I’m the chancellor!!”

As that voice got further and further away, Azuma stood there, left behind.

“Um... I’m...”

“Azuma, there should still be people retaining their sanity, so for now, once you walk around the places where nothing stupid is happening and meet up, please evacuate to the courtyard. I can’t pay you, so please do this voluntarily.”

Shirojiro’s voice, mixed with a sigh, continued to echo about.

“Seriously...” saying this, he continued.

“—Why is it that my friends are my biggest embarrassment?”

•

A single man stood within the pale and fleeting light.

Clutching documents in his arms, the man was Sakai.

His breath ragged, he was standing in a corridor lit up by lamps.

“Sakakibara...”

It was inside his colleague’s home.

The maid-type automaton that had followed him here was behind him.

“Judge, that is my master’s study.”

On the other side of the sliding screen, which had been left open, there existed the space called the study.

It was a room floored with six tatami mats. Further inside, there was a paper

sliding window, half opened in order to look upon the garden.

Just in front of him there were bookcases containing texts to his left and right, with two on the right and one on the left. There was alcove to the left where a bookcase had not been placed, but it had been filled in with boxes containing brush cases and paper.

There was a writing desk in the middle of the room.

On the side of the writing desk facing Sakai there was a futon made for sitting.

If you sat on the futon, you could work while looking out at the lantern-lit garden. That was how the study was laid out.

However, its owner was not there. In his place...

“The Double Border Crest...”

On the floor from the desk to the wall and partway up a large crimson-black design had been drawn. It was facing the window, barely reaching up to the paper window, and there were letters written on the plaster of the wall. The words marked there were, as Sakai read...

“ ‘What are you doing?’ ...”

There were papers in the room.

But not Sakakibara.

No...

...He had disappeared somewhere.

Sakai had noticed this when he took the documents from the automaton.

The automaton said this: “Judge, before he went to work, I received an instruction to take what was lying on his table and bring it to you afterward; so I fulfilled it.”

That meant it wasn’t an instruction given after he finished his work.

Furthermore, the papers that had been lying on his writing desk were now in his hands, but...

“They’re blank...”

There was no way Sakakibara would hand over a bundle of blank papers. However, the fact that the automatons brought it meant that he had finished his work. Regarding this, the automaton spoke.

“—My master was not here, so I judged that he had finished his work. I was considering whether or not to start cleaning this room...”

Sakakibara was nowhere to be found.

On the writing desk was Japanese paper, laid atop black cloth, and an inkstone sprinkled with nothing but water.

It was as if he stood up from his seat just as he was about to rub it with ink.

Sakai walked a step into the room, checking for signs of Sakakibara.

Doing this, he noticed something strange. Water was dripping from the inkstone.

...This...

Was he repelling the water with ink? No, Sakakibara's the type to be anal with writing. He would be strict with the usage of the tools. He shouldn't use them in a disorderly fashion.

“Then...”

Taking his second step into the room, Sakai saw it:

The black cloth as well as the Japanese paper, held down by a paperweight, on the table. There was a crease in the paper.

The signs of a water stain on the paper, which had then dried.

The result showed that the handwriting was like a brush being dragged across the paper, writing something.

Two things.

One of them was...

“The Double Border Crest...”

The second one was a word. It was a word that Sakai knew. It was...

“—Pursue.”

The mumbled word ended there.

As if reaffirming what his next step was, Sakai looked at the bundle of papers he was clutching to his chest.

The bundle of papers where nothing was written.

However, on the sheet on the top of the bundle there were slender creases. Water stains.

It was something that Sakakibara had marked before writing on the paper that he had held down with a paperweight. Something that lay on top of the stack of papers.

Written there was this.

“ ‘The Genesis Project’ ...!?”

The words that seemed to have been written in advance, the meaning of the symbol, the words that came next... Sakai lined them up and muttered them.

“The Genesis Project, the Princess... Pursue.”

I know that he's telling me to pursue the Princess. However...

...The Genesis Project is... P.A. Oda's countermeasure against the Apocalypse, right? Why would he...

I don't understand. These things before me...whether or not Sakakibara knew that he would disappear, the contents of the water stains he hurriedly left with his brush, the fact that he himself disappeared... I don't understand any of it.

...What does this mean!?

Everyone has heard about the phenomena of spiriting away. However, if my colleagues have all been subjected to it recently, then we're talking about something else entirely. Even as it happens before my eyes, I keep thinking that I can't believe it.

Ahh... Sakai thought.

He wished that Sakakibara would come from behind him and say that everything was just a joke.

“Yet...when I disappeared, did you think that as well?”

That which he asked, the paper with water stains, was beginning to dry; and the creases were beginning to fade.

To disappear.

At this fact, Sakai felt the needlessness in staying any longer.

The instant he tried to take one step back.

He could hear a sound. A sound that came from beyond the opened window in front of him.

A low rumble that sounded like distant thunder.

A sound that spoke of an explosion.

Chapter 16: Those Who Prepare in the Courtyard

CHAPTER 16

"Those Who Prepare in the Courtyard"



Will the festival eventually end.
And, will the festival start.

Point Allocation (Density)

Will the festival eventually end

And, will the festival start

Point Allocation (Density)

•

In the courtyard one could see the tremors running through the Academy.

The mayhem seemed to have been noticed by others; an audience stood outside the Academy's outer fence.

"Ahh, again...?"

No one entered the school grounds, though they all spoke.

Azuma, standing in the courtyard, had gathered everyone who had run away from the disturbances happening everywhere in the school. He heaved a sigh as they all stood there atop the lawn.

Somehow, it seemed that inside a fight had broken out between the students and the mercenary groups. From time to time some white thing, or people in bodysuits, or cosplay that was hard to even describe would be ejected from the emergency exit or windows of the first floor.

...They're really going at it, he thought. Beside him, Ohiroshiki shoveled the snacks he had brought with him as a late night snack into his mouth.

"Mmm. I am of the humble opinion that we should call the teacher on night duty. Will she be alright?"

"Oriotorai-sensei...? When I went to see her just now, she was sleeping soundly, a sake bottle in her arms."

The person who answered him was Adele. Using her handkerchief, she was fanning Asama who was lying on the lawn face up.

"So we can't..." Everyone muttered this, Azuma included.

As they muttered this, another person in a black bodysuit fell after being blasted through the wall. He looked their way, thrusting out his chest, on which the word "Love" was written in red. Afterward, he disappeared to the starboard.

“...Anyone know him?”

Hearing Noriki’s voice, Naomasa folded her arms and tilted her head to the side.

“That guy who left just now was probably Koide Ou from Shinagawa’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry. That pillar before was wavin’ at Asama-chi, so... Asama-chi, your father didn’t leave the shrine tonight without tellin’ you where he was going, did he? ...Hey, why’re you glarin’ this way. It’s time to accept your father’s true end.”

“T-this isn’t over, t-this hasn’t been decided!” Asama said before she collapsed. It was Suzu’s duty to lay the handkerchief out under her face.

And looking at everyone, who was doing this, Azuma thought:

...It’s just like always, huh.

He nodded in his heart; but today, he felt this way again.

...Everyone’s in a good mood?

Tomorrow, Toori will confess to the girl he loves. Everyone’s in good spirits because of that, right? Because I came to Musashi after secondary school, I didn’t know what they were like before then. It seems like many of them have been with Aoi since elementary school. Because of this, I wasn’t excluded, but the way I feel during these times is different.

He thought this as well.

Hassan took a drink from the curry he kept inside a thermos.

“Ah, it’s the Schaefer couple. They’re always a big help at our stationery shop.”

A skeleton couple ran out of the emergency exit on the first floor, clutching the suspension platform used to hold samples. While they were dashing out, the husband’s rib bone fell off. The wife grabbed it out of the air and inserted it back, bowing to the group as she did so.

“It’s gradually become the sideshow of a carnival...”

Looking closely, there was a mummy on the roof.

“Ah, that’s Mishra the Third. He runs the dried foods restaurant, ‘Horus’.” [20]

He hung his bandages from the edge of the rooftop and started to rappel down, his movements hurried. As he did so, when he was around the second floor, Aoi’s sister ran to the edge of the rooftop. She grabbed the edges of the bandages.

“Teeheehee, there are some nice dried goods here! What do you want me to do with this lifeline, your bandages!? Should I cut it!? Take it off!? If you don’t want to fall, then worship me! If you don’t, not only will I drop you, I’ll spin you around like a handmaiden!”

“That girl really doesn’t know how to threaten people. Or rather, Mishra the Third can’t talk, can he, since his throat’s dry?”

Azuma nodded at those words, which everyone spoke. But really, amongst everyone, it seemed that it was Aoi’s sister that was devoid of energy.

...If things were normal, she would have definitely said that she’d drop him and still order him to worship her.

Something about her is strange tonight. Well, she’s always strange; but the way she’s being strange is different, or should I say, not dropping him immediately is in itself strange.

It’s a difficult question to answer, Azuma thought. As he watched, Mishra the Third, dangling in the air, had put his arms over his head, making a heart shape with them.

Seeing this, Aoi’s sister put her hands on her cheeks and shook her head.

“Hehehe, it’s wonderful to be so beautiful that even dried goods acknowledge it~!”

Because she had released the bandages, Mishra the Third fell.

However, below them, Nenji had come from behind the school building.

“Hrmph, no one was behind the school building! It must have been because of the invincibility of my party’s majesty!!”

His invincible majesty was blown apart by the dried humanoid that came falling from above.

Everyone watched as Itoken, a refreshing smile on his face came from behind Nenji. He was completely naked.

“Hiiii! Everyone! The back of the school is fi— Waitwaitwait, Nenji-kun! Are you alright!?”

While he was speaking, Mishra the Third rose. Wrapping his bandages around himself, he raised a hand to gesture sorry several times before leaving. Nenji, left behind, slowly reformed.

“He, Hehe...that was dangerous.”

...He’s serious, as usual.

Azuma thought.

It would be perfect if Oriotorai were here; or rather, if she were here the mayhem would be quelled with overwhelming levels of violence. But if that were to happen, it would definitely become a bigger disturbance than it already was; so it was a matter of whether to go with “quality” or “duration”.

Suddenly, there was a movement beside him.

Suzu had stood up.

“U-um, w-water, A-Asama-san’s...b-breath is, r-ragged.”

She was going to draw water. The tap that sprinkled water to the school from the waterways was close to the entrance, but it wasn’t drinking water, as this was the water that circulated throughout the interior of the ship. The drinking water was inside the school.

“Bell-san, um, if you go there now, you’ll get drawn in.”

Adele tried to stop her, her tone suggesting that she had no idea what she was doing. At that moment.

A large voice boomed out nearby, coming from the direction Suzu was trying to go.

“—What on Earth is this outrage...! This disturbance in our town!!”

Everyone turned to look up at Yoshinao, who had stood in front of Suzu at some point in time.

He, Yoshinao, seemed to realize that everyone had fallen silent at his shout. He looked around.

“This is completely inexcusable! Who started this! Get out here!”

“He’s got a point.” Everyone nodded; but one person reacted differently.

“—Hyaah...!”

That sound, a breath filled with fear, came from directly in front of Yoshinao.

“—Hy...aaa...ah...”

Her arms clutched before her chest, Suzu was trying to keep her trembling back.

Ah, Azuma thought. This is bad.

If a large voice suddenly comes at you while you’re nervous...

Suzu, who was blind, had entered a state akin to one where she had been punched.

Her breath caught; but when she tried to breathe out, she felt like vomiting.

And apparently, Yoshinao had just noticed her.

“—? What is the matter with you? If there is something you want to say, then come right out and say it!”

At his insistence, Suzu opened her mouth wide and screamed.

“Uwaaaaaaaaaaaaah!!”

•

Suzu burst into tears.

Everyone reared back at the sound, which seemed to blow away all the noise that had been happening till then. Yoshinao stood there, panicked.

“H-hey, you, w-what...”

“I-I-I-I d-don’t like, t-this guy...!”

“Wow, Suzu-san, you’re completely in the right.” Everyone nodded. However, Yoshinao heard this.

“A-all of you! Causing such a disturbance is—”

“Hyaaaaaaan!!”

Her voice rang out. As might be expected, the crowd had started to panic. But despite this, Azuma, in the midst of them, waved his hands about attracting attention to himself.

“U-umm, about what we should do now...”

Hassan nodded at Azuma’s proposal. Taking a medicinal pouch from his chest, he poured white powder from it into his magic bottle, which he had only drunk a little curry from. Replacing the lid, he shook the bottle.

“Well, if you drink curry, all your worries will fly away~”

“W-what did you put in there just now!?”

Hearing Naomasa’s question, Hassan nodded, his face expressionless.

“Spice.”

“That can’t be right! That was definitely a drug!”

“You’re wrong. Curry is made out of several different spices. So what you put in curry is spice. It’s only logical.”

“Somebody take a dump in his curry next time!!”

“We am trying to say that you kids have been ignor—”

Yoshinao said. Just as those words left his mouth, all the windows of the school opened at once. The people inside the building thrust their heads outside.

For a moment, they all looked to the left and right; but not long after they noticed Suzu, who stood there crying.

“Nuuah—! Warning! Warning! Musashi’s cutest bangs has been brought to tears!”

“Damn it, how did this happen! Whatever the cause, we seek everyone’s opinion concerning the offender’s punishment!”

Everyone who had their head sticking out the window stuck their fist out,

thumbs facing downward. All of them nodded.

“Alright! Unanimously decided to be the death penalty! No problems, no questions, no mercy! The offender is...”

Toori, who had stuck his head out of a window on the top floor, found Yoshinao.

Yoshinao’s eyes met his.

“Y-you! Chancellor and student council president! The disturbance this time is —”

“Hey, guys, everyone look! There’s an idiot who’s cosplaying as a king, right over there! He must be the culprit! Seriously, that’s a douche move, dressing like the king so he can lower everyone’s inhibitions!”

“W-what are you saying!? We are the real thing! We are the true King of Musashi, Lord Yoshinao!!”

“Huh? What did you say? The king’s got no friends, so he wouldn’t come here. As expected, the fake doesn’t know anything about the king. The real king’s playing minesweeper on his PC, alright? Didn’t you know?”

“You bastaaard—!!”

“Uwaaaaaan!!”

Suzu’s voice resounded again.

The instant directly after...

“——”

Suddenly, the sound of Suzu’s crying halted.

She fell silent.

Almost as if her voice itself had been stopped.

•

“Eh?” Everyone looked at Suzu, who stood in the middle of them. She softly closed her mouth, which had been wide open.

Suzu touched her ears with her hands.

“Eh...?”

She spoke the question that everyone had been thinking.

As she stood there frowning, a voice came from above her.

“Hey, King, move! And get down! You’re getting in Bell-san’s way!!”

Hearing these instructions, Yoshinao felt lost. But matching everyone’s movements, he lowered himself.

Left in the middle of the crowd, all of whom had knelt down, Suzu tilted her ears to the left and right without even wiping the tears from her cheeks.

After a moment...

“—O-over there.”

She looked towards Musashi’s port. The east.

Located there was Kakamigahara’s mountain range.

However, in the depths of night, all that was there was a pitch black, bottomless space. Beyond the mountains, towards the south, should have been the town of Mikawa; but from Musashi’s point of view it lay in the mountain’s shadow, so you could not see the light from the town.

Black. It was even unclear whether the mountain itself was there. There was just a darkness that seemed like a black fog, beyond which nothing could be seen.

Despite this, the darkness suddenly shattered. Within the embracing dark, a light shined.

It was the light of a fire starting.

Flames. On the peak of Kakamigahara’s mountain, an inferno was born.

“Huh...”

Exactly as Suzu spoke, a sound which seemed like distant thunder could be heard.

Hearing that noise, Naomasa muttered, her body still kept low.

“Isn’t that an explosion?”

As if responding to her, Neshinbara, whose head was thrust out of the school building's windows, said this.

“Of the watchtowers the Testament Union set up to maintain surveillance of Mikawa, there should be one at the top, around there... It's true that they should be packed with Tres España's students now, but what could it be? An accident? Maybe it's just a fire...the watchtower below it can't be seen from here, but I wonder...hasn't it noticed?”

As the flames in the distance became stronger, small voices began to break out from within the crowd.

“What's wrong?” “What's going on?” People were saying. There were also people who had started trying to make calls with their phones.

“Oookaaaay! We'll have to wait till next time for the continuation!!”

Hearing Toori's voice, everyone besides Yoshinao nodded.

They started to move. Everyone left the windows, exiting the building from the entrance. Everyone stood up and started to walk off.

They started to move.

As they started to move out, Yoshinao gave the crowd a glance before lightly bowing his head to Suzu.

In response, Suzu drew back slightly. However, Yoshinao dropped to one knee, right before her eyes. He did this even as the people in the crowd were headed towards their homes or the places they needed to be. Upon kneeling, he said this.

“We had no intention of scaring you. Please forgive us. Also...”

He stood up and pointed to Toori, who was above them.

“We play solitaire, not minesweeper. Understand?”

He corrected him before turning his back.

He left. Seeing his back start to walk off, everyone in the class heaved a sigh.

Pushing her glasses back up to the bridge of her nose, Adele clutched her practice lance.

“It seems like we managed to cover it up somehow, but...what could those flames be?”

Shirojiro exited from the entrance of the building. He spoke with Heidi.

“I can’t contact the Mikawa’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry. There should be automatons there, though.”

“Even looking at it now, the light coming from Mikawa isn’t increasing... Could it be the town isn’t working?”

All around, they could see that all the cosplayers and the real monsters had left, following the spectators out of the Academy. Only the people who had gathered on the bridge at the beginning and Azuma were left behind.

Shirojiro cast his gaze upon everyone before folding his arms. He took his Mouse, a white fox, out of the armor by his neck.

“...The phones’ circuits are probably scrambled. The effect should be reduced if we use the Mouse’s direct divine communication or written divine communication. If you’re in a hurry, everyone do it themselves. That’s fine, right? In general, the fees for sound divine communications are high...”

“Shiro-kun, Shiro-kun, you’re starting to lecture.”

Hearing Heidi’s warning, Shirojiro nodded. After a while, he raised a hand lightly.

“I’ll be busy. Heidi, please use Erimaki to enable the opening of divine communications to all of the Far East residential areas in each country. I’m going to pull a step ahead of the other people in Musashi’s merchant group. Please prepare the introduction of hard currency for all countries into my finances within Musashi. Not just yen, the common currency.”

“Judge. Haha, I think we’re going to be glared at after this, but that happens every time... Then, everyone, it’s time for us to dispe-...”

“P-please wait...”

Suzu formed that voice.

She had noticed the flames first. Hearing her words, everyone opened their eyes and stopped moving.

Suzu shrank back a little, but she stretched her right hand forward, as if to grasp at something.

“U-um... Excuse me...”

Everyone looked in the direction Suzu was pointing. At a single boy, who stood there. It was...

“—Me?” [\[21\]](#)

•

Having been pointed out by Suzu, Azuma tilted his head to the side.

...What?

Did something happen? Suzu pays attention to sound. So, if something happened...

“Um.”

I’m still wearing my uniform. There’s nothing on my head, chest, or my waist. Despite this...

“——”

By the time I realized it, everyone was looking at me. Looking up, I could see that even Toori was.

Azuma leaned his head forward and looked at his feet. Yet, there was nothing there.

What’s going on? Inclining his neck again, he searched his sides.

Seeing this, everyone spoke.

“You! [\[22\]](#) Not there! Behind you! Behind you!!”

“Behind me?”

Having been told this, Azuma asked this question. He turned to look at the direction the question was directed and his eyes fixed upon the first thing they saw.

It was a small hand holding the hem of his uniform.

There stood a girl. Her long white hair was mussed, her skin was white. Azuma didn't know this girl.

Her face was on the brink of tears.

“——”

Her feet stepped onto the lawn, their owner staying silent. Suzu must have noticed those footsteps. Despite this...

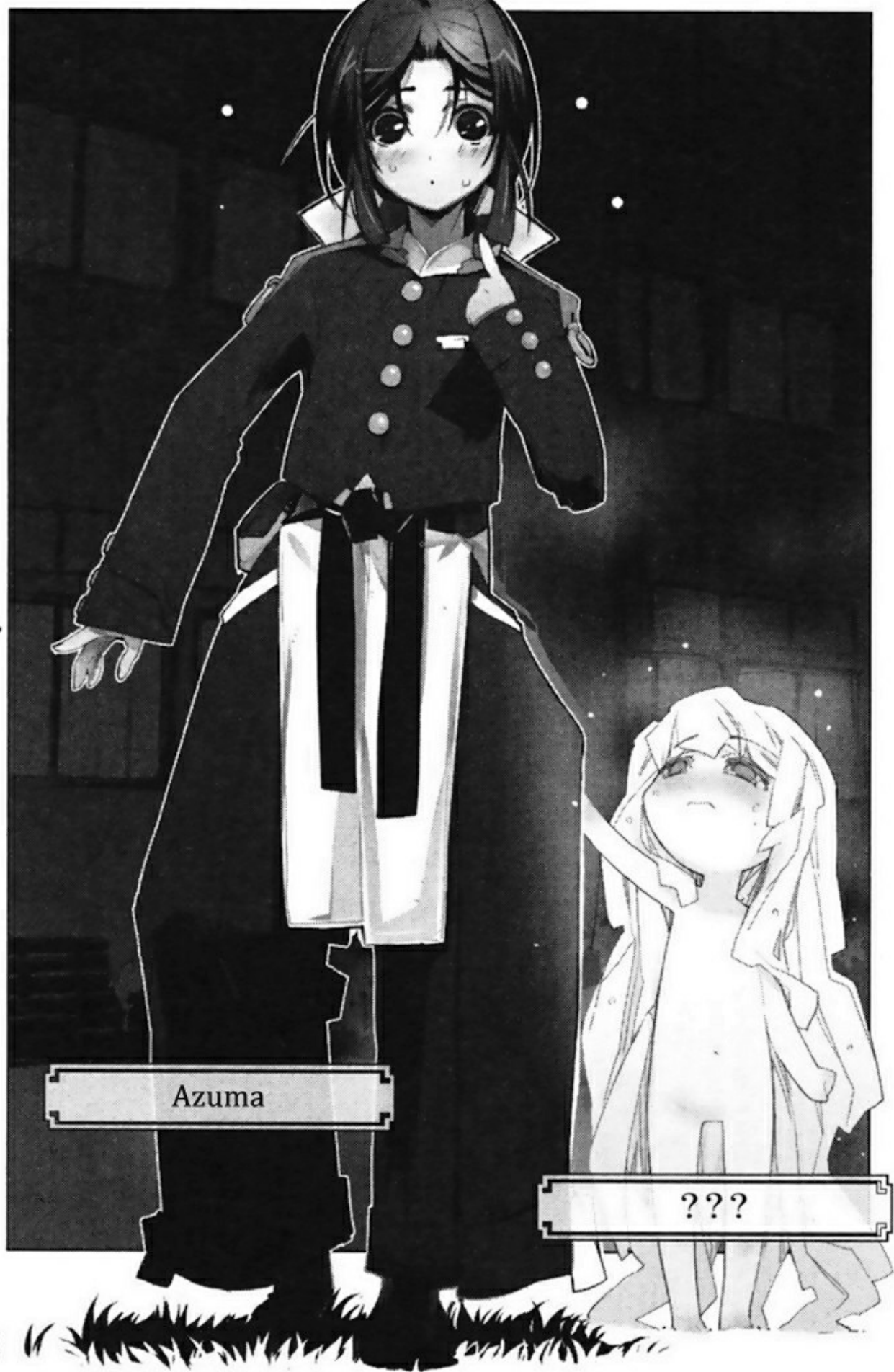
“She's transparent...?”

The girl's body, not even one meter tall, was half transparent. Even the ground and the grass looked transparent because of the flickering. The cloth on my hem that she had grabbed could also be seen through.

Everyone held their breath upon seeing this. At that moment, the girl spoke. Her black eyes looked at me.

“Daddy isn't here...”

And looking down...



Azuma

???

“I can’t find Mommy...”

Is she lost? Azuma thought. However, before considering that, there was something he had to say.

Instead of Azuma, it was everyone else who shouted the words.

“It’s...”

They took a breath.

“It’s heeeeeereeeeeee!!”

•

He heard a sound.

In the middle of the study in Sakakibara’s estate, Sakai had indeed heard a sound.

It was a sound he had become familiar with. A sound that echoed in his gut before dropping. It was the sound of an explosion. That, he knew. In that case, what he now thought was this.

...Why? Why is there an explosion?

I don’t know. There’s no way I would know. There are so many things that I don’t know.

li has disappeared. Sakakibara has also disappeared. He told me to chase after the Princesses and the Genesis Project. And now...

...An explosion?

What’s going on?

Ten years ago, I was transferred to Musashi. Even when I disembarked, nobody would face me. But when we met today, we were able to talk, just like we used to.

Why is that changing as the night grows older?

“Damn it...”

Sakai moved. He went. He exited the study, moving into the hallway, and ran to the entrance. Behind him, the maid automaton was asking him where he was

going, but there was no point in answering. He just went outside. In order to reconfirm the fact that he knew nothing, in order to just look at what was happening.

He went outside.

Sakai opened the entrance's sliding door by throwing his body against it, simultaneously thrusting his body out.

The garden was formed from stone and pine trees. There were stepping stones lined up and formed a 'Ç#'. With such momentum that he only touched the first and the last one, he bounded over them.

The gate was open. Beyond it, the streets on which darkness had descended could be seen.

He went. In order to pass through the gate, he leaped. In the air, he lowered his hip, preparing to hit the ground.

That instant. Sakai saw two colors.

The first was the mountains in Kakamigahara. The Testament Union's observatories for Mikawa on the mountain were the color of blazing flame.

The second came at his right leg as if to trap it.

...A butt of a spear!?

His right foot shrank back, but it was too late.

From the out to the in, he was driven to the side, the butt catching his foot. Sakai lost his balance in the air.

•

“—!?”

Sakai forced his body to struggle against the movement which led his right shoulder to fall towards the floor.

By thrusting his left hip up, he added another half of a revolution to his movement.

A full turn. He landed in a crouching position.

His feet touched the ground, stepping onto the sand.

Simultaneously, he drew the dagger kept behind his waist halfway out of the scabbard, preparing for an attack coming from above.

While bringing his left hand inward to restrain any attacks coming from the left, he hauled himself up with the same hand.

He stood. By dropping his hip, he was able to take a stance where his right shoulder was sticking out, his hand holding his knife in a backhand grip.

Sakai swept his gaze through and focused his hearing on his surroundings.

“—Who is it?”

At the place his question was directed, two figures appeared on the street.

They appeared from within the shadows of the buildings, dyed darker than the already dark street.

“Da-chan and...”

“Judge, I am the controller of all automatons linked to the Honda family, Kazuno.”

•

As Sakai watched, Kazuno clasped her empty hands in front of her and bowed.

Tadakatsu stood next to her. He held a spear in his hands and was looking at Sakai.

Sakai looked at Tadakatsu before his eyes locked onto the spear. The spear with a blade tipped like a bamboo's leaf.

“...Tonbokiri. A divine class weapon. A weapon with the power to slice even matter itself...”

“—You've gotten older. You can't avoid it anymore.”

Tadakatsu spoke, bringing up Tonbokiri, which he had used to hook Sakai's foot by stretching it outward. Having done this, he shortened it. Tightening the socket which controlled Tonbokiri's lengthening mechanism, he took a straight pipe from his chest.

An instant. As Kazuno stood beside him, her wrist flicked up, flicking the tip of the pipe with enough force to send it jumping up.

Along with a muffled thump, a fire was lit in the crushed leaves stuffed inside the tip of the pipe.

“—I apologize for my discourtesy.”

“Don’t worry ’bout it... Then, Sakai, about you.”

Three noises rang out as Tadakatsu spoke.

The first was the sound of the Testament Union’s aerial gods of war taking flight in the skies high above, going from the west to the east in order to maintain air superiority.

The second was the sound of of the Testament Union’s escort ships rising from the western continental port and heading towards the flames at Kakamigahara.

And the final one was this.

“Hey, Da-chan... This sound is...”

A faint noise, but a noise with real depth. A noise that seemed to soak into and through all that it touched.

“...Coming from the ground...no, from even deeper...”

Sakai was able to predict what it was beneath the ground that was causing this noise. However...

...This is reckless...

Despite this, the noise came slowly. An “oh” here, a “do” there...these sounds could be heard. This was not because the ground was shaking, but because the crust, the earth above it and the air itself was being shaken.

It was floating up.

“——”

A long, long beat was struck.

It was a pulse.

The periodic pulse that you could feel when pressing down a vein, except stretched out for a long time, for tens of seconds.

The earth pulsed.

...This is...

Gulping down a breath, I directed my gaze forward, and in front of me, next to Kazuno, stood Tadakatsu.

The edge of Tadakatsu's mouth was curled upward.

That crook in his mouth slowly opened.

"It's the ley line, Sakai. You remember it, don't you? When we constructed Old Nagoya Castle during our time of service, the ley line reactor, which filters ether, was made badly and it often would come to the brink of overload. When it did, this sound would fill the air."

I remember. What he's saying is true. This was from more than ten years ago, when I still served as one of the Matsudaira Four Heavenly Kings.

Ley line reactors were interdicted by the countries of the Tsirhc Testament, but since Mikawa didn't fall under their jurisdiction, it continued to run. Because of this, Mikawa was relied upon by the countries of the Tsirhc Testament for the manufacturing of aerial ships and arms, and these countries would then order them from us. We somehow managed to keep the old style ley line reactors running and fulfilling their function.

Ley line reactors's function is to disaggregate ether from the ley lines, purifying it into ether fuel. By spending exorbitant amounts of money on its costs of operation, it is possible to acquire higher levels of ether fuel. However, because this drains a ley line, the ley lines in the vicinity will narrow and become unstable.

As such, it is feared that the appearance of the pulsing noise of the ley line, which indicates the instability of the ley line reactor, calls out monsters and phenomena.

"We were the ones calmly eating and smoking as this sound boomed out, weren't we, Da-chan?"

“Yeah. But Sakai...you, who were called the Grand Head, have become old.”

As he spoke, a thunderous roar ripped through the sky above Tadakatsu, which was already pulsing.

The Testament Union’s gods of war. Robotic bodies with four wings, spread in the style of a cross. They had originally come to keep watch on Mikawa, but they had been deployed by the Testament Union, who had seen the flames from the watchhouse.

Each of the three units circled clockwise through Mikawa’s airspace, striving to preserve their air superiority.

If anything were to happen, Tres España, in charge of Mikawa’s surveillance, would be held responsible. The gods of war traversing the sky and the fact that they had even mobilized their aerial ships to control the watchhouse were both shows of force as well as manifestations of their impatience.

However, there were probably people in the Testament Union who had not noticed this heartbeat.

Tres España had started to move out. Their attentions were drawn by the diversion by the mountain range. As such, they should not have noticed the real danger, which lay on the ground, at the ley line reactor in New Nagoya Castle. Therefore...

“...The gods of war above us aren’t armed for anti-surface but anti-air warfare. The ships are filled with infantry armed for mountainous warfare, so they can take over the watchhouse. In other words...they’ve come into Mikawa unsuitably armed.”

“Yeah, that’s right. They’ve made the worst possible adjustments, or in other words...they’re entering Mikawa with a disadvantage.”

Still, Tadakatsu said this.

“The enemy hasn’t grasped the situation yet. They’re communicating with New Nagoya Castle in order to inform them of the incident’s details. The automatons receiving their messages should be buying time.”

“Why?”

“Isn’t it obvious? If they just marched right in so simply, we’d get rolled.”

Tadakatsu puffed out smoke.

“Three of ’em are going, so the balance’s tipped, and the pulse’s started. It’s probably been noticed by now, so the diversion’s over. Now, it’s time to get inside and hold out till the other two start up.”

“Wait.”

Sakai spoke. He asked about the numbers that Tadakatsu had told him.

“By three and two, you mean...”

“I’m obviously talking about New Nagoya Castle’s ley line reactors, right? The four in the rectangle and the unified one in the center. We’re carefully making them overload right now.”

Hearing Tadakatsu speak, Sakai’s thoughts stopped for an instant.

...Overloading the ley line reactors?

It’s easy to do. All you have to do is run the mechanism that extracts the ether at a higher setting. If you do this, the extracted ether will be captured in large amounts inside the reactor before heading to the storage and preparation chambers, and it will erode the reactor from the inside.

Unrefined ether is able to freely cause variants in space. Because it has no tendencies towards a certain direction, continual accumulation will begin interferences and erode the surroundings. Eventually, they will cause “alterations” in each other.

When it reaches that stage, it will come to an end. It will devour the reactor, and the “alterations” will reflux in the ley line reactor, expanding at high speed. The effects of erosion will continue to spread until it mixes with other space and its individuality is diluted.

Once, before the Divine States were oppressed, a ley line reactor in the Harmonic Divine States’ Rus’ had overloaded and self-destructed. In the same way, eight years ago, directly after his inheritance of the name, Nobunaga of P.A. Oda destroyed all remnants of the Mlasi rebellion’s military power with the overloading and eventual self-destruction of a ley line reactor. They hunted

them down until they were gathered in Mount Hiei, where a temple was built, and they annihilated it.

In both of these incidents...

“Everything within a radius of a few kilometers was obliterated... If you start five of them, Mikawa, let alone Nagoya, will be destroyed!”

“That’s why I’m saying, you’ve gotten old.”

Tadakatsu told him, a smile on his face.

“There is nobody left in Mikawa. Just the automatons and us. Because of this... Hell, I really want to see it. The destruction of Mikawa, caused not by that piece of junk during our time of service, but by the collapse of the ley line due to the overloading of this new model of ley line reactors.”

“— —”

“Since you’ve come from Sakakibara’s mansion, you were asking him, weren’t you? About why we were doing this?”

“Sakakibara’s disappeared... He was spirited away by the Princesses.”

“Oh?” Tadakatsu said. He looked up at the shadows of the gods of war flying around in the sky.

“So, you haven’t asked why. That’s a shame...there were a lot of things I wanted to ask. A disappointment.”

“Disappointment...?”

“I’m talking about myself, alright? I’ve just been following the orders of my lord. Ii and Sakakibara seemed to know something, but I don’t really know anything, let alone what’s happening. All that the Lord told me was that this...”

A breath.

“That this was the start of the Genesis Project.”

•

“Didn’t you realize?” Tadakatsu said.

“The Genesis Project is something P.A. Oda began. But, you know, don’t you?

That Mikawa is allied with P.A. Oda? And P.A. Oda won't release the details of the Genesis Project. Why? The answer is simple, isn't it?"

"—The Genesis Project was brought to P.A. Oda by Mikawa!?"

"You finally know one thing. Information that even I know, but at least it's something."

Indeed.

"The Lord hasn't yet made everything clear to P.A. Oda. Neither has he told us. The only thing we asked was: 'Can everything be saved by this?' "

In response to Tadakatsu's words, Sakai moved. He drew the dagger from his waist and took a step forward.

"Stop this now...or I'll bind you."

Tonbokiri's tip pierced the air before my eyes.

No. In terms of distance, there were still three meters between him and the blade and I.

However, because Tadakatsu was aiming along the line that traversed the shortest distance between them, the blade felt close.

"...You haven't lost your intuition as much as you've lost what you know."

"And if I had?"

"Can't do anything but stab you, right? That's my job. 'Loyalty' and 'victory' make up Tadakatsu."

Even while speaking, the tip of his spear moved not an inch. If I move, I'll be pierced where I stand.

As he stayed there unmoving, the heartbeat rumbled, and the sounds of the ships and gods of war in the skies echoed.

Tadakatsu spoke, as if to further stack up the sound.

"Go, Sakai... I don't have the time to care about you. Now, I have to go intercept the land forces that K.P.A. Italia and Tres España will send, while they're unable to completely grasp the situation."

“You idiot, if the ley line reactors overload while you’re doing that...”

“To be victorious in the name of my lord’s wishes. Without asking his reasons. Merely abiding. This is what the name Tadakatsu means to me. So, Tadatsugu, how does your devotion take shape? Wasn’t it ‘loyalty’ and ‘to link to the next’?”

“Go,” Tadakatsu told him.

“This is no longer the place you belong. Just like how the place you are to go isn’t the place we belong.”

“...Sakakibara said that we’d always be together as the Four Heavenly Kings, you know?”

“Yeah,”

Tadakatsu withdrew Tonbokiri.

“We will always be together in the past. And we are always heading into the past together.”

Saying this, he snapped his fingers and turned his back to Kazuno.

Kazuno bowed to Sakai over Tadakatsu’s shoulder and started to walk towards the center of Nagoya.

In the same way, Tadakatsu turned in that direction. However, he turned his head back.

“Now, I am going to become the past, together with my lord. Come too, eventually. And when you do, tell me what the hell the Genesis Project was. Also...”

He smiled.

“If the thing I am to do is the first step in order to save us from the Apocalypse, praise me then.”

“Da-chan.”

Sakai called out to Tadakatsu, who had already turned his back.

“What about your daughter!? There’s a lot of other things too, you know!? What are you going to do about—”

His words stopped there.

...The shaking was...

The heartbeat had turned to quaking.

Simultaneously. As if the sky had lost its support, everything was pushed down.

“...!?”

Directly after. Mikawa cracked apart.

The overloading of the ley line reactor interfered with the ley line running through the crust and space, and space split open like a blood vessel bursting.

Sound shattered, the atmosphere fell, the ground was torn off.

“—!?”

The collapse had started.

•

On the second ship on Musashi's starboard, Tama, murmurs were starting to rise at the bow. These murmurs were the first stage of an uproar.

The reason for the crowd's voices being brought forth was the inferno burning in the eastern mountains, and...

“Mikawa is...”

From the ship, Mikawa was in a direction where it could not be seen because of the mountains. In the same direction, the skies beyond the mountain were lit up by light shining from the ground. It resonated with the sound that could be likened to a heartbeat.

The air swayed. Not wind, but a swaying that came and went. The swaying of air maintained constant pressure, reaching the ships from Mikawa.

Following the rumor of fireworks, a crowd was gathered on the deck of the surface layer. Stalls had been set up along the length of the crowd, and the lights had come on. However, it was still dim, and within that dimness, the people watched the flames and the light shining from Mikawa.

In the midst of them was Masazumi, dressed in her school uniform. Masazumi was looking in the direction of Mikawa.

“This is...”

The moment she wondered whether President Sakai had returned.

“—Masazumi-sama.”

Masazumi turned back to face the woman whose voice had called out to her from behind. She caught a white-haired automaton at the tip of her vision, P-01s. A thick book clutched under her arm, she was hiding black algae creatures behind her feet.

“It has been a while. I did not really understand what fireworks were, so I read the book that you gave me. I have finally finished reading it. To speak bluntly, P-01s has done well.”

Masazumi listened to her quiet voice as they stood within the murmurs that ran back and forth through the crowd. However, P-01s’s words stopped there.

Masazumi felt lost at the break in the conversation, but after a while, she noticed why.

“Ah, yeah, you did well. I can’t believe you read the whole thing.”

“Judge, I am honored to receive your compliments. This book was extremely informative concerning the response patterns of the people acting as politicians and leaders. It seems to be a recent trend that the greater the person, the more they suddenly—in agony, or by drowning, or in fits of anger—take responsibility by committing harakiri.”

What on Earth was she interested in when she was reading, Masazumi thought. Despite this, she let it alone.

...Maybe the fact that she wants to know about humans’ behavioral patterns, is because of that.

As an automaton who doesn’t know where she comes from, what does she want to think of herself as? Isn’t she looking at humans’ judgements from books in order to learn from them? Masazumi thought.

Where had P-01s come from this time? She had brought a few black algae

creatures with her, but because of the darkness, they didn't stand out.

"Worked hard. Did well."

Crouching down to look at the black algae creatures, who were saying things like that, she showed them a lightly clenched fist.

"Judge, there is a proverb about this. Persistence is a form of strength. No matter the difficulty, it is possible to overcome it."

Was the book that difficult to read? Masazumi thought, but for now, there was something that she was able to judge.

...The light shining into the skies wasn't that of fireworks.

Something is happening. It's probably possible to watch from here, but we'd eventually be unable to move around. After all, even now there are people coming up from below, and the density of the crowd is increasing. Therefore...

"I'm thinking about moving away from here, but what will you do, P-01s?"

"Are there no fireworks?"

"Probably not."

"A shame. Regret."

"Judge," P-01s nodded down at her feet. Looking up slightly, she thought about it for a moment.

"Where are you going?"

"Where?"

Somehow it seems like I'm gradually being excluded from the conversation, Masazumi thought.

"Well, first of all, let's leave this place... There's a monitor at the Blue Thunder, right? I don't know if the shopkeeper's there, but if she is, I think she'll know a lot about it."

"Judge," P-01s nodded. Pushing her forward once, Masazumi started to walk. Her footsteps were a little hurried, but the automaton was walking at her own pace. So, she thrust her body outward, moving through the crowd of people, in which there were still gaps, and creating a path for P-01s. Having done this, the

black algae creatures said this.

“Going first.”

They hid themselves in a nearby gutter. P-01s waved and saw them off.

Right now, the paces of those around them were slow and perplexed.

However, there was a doubt in Masazumi’s heart, a vague suspicion that came close to impatience. The suspicion was this.

...This couldn’t be the ley line reactors in New Nagoya Castle overloading, could it...?

There were four basic models and one unified model. If the ley line is drawn in and explodes because of the overload...

...In the reactor core explosion that had happened in Russia, just one had annihilated tens of kilometers.

The events surrounding the overloading in Russia are unknown. In any case, everything, let alone evidence, had disappeared.

But having used that explosion as a basis, the countries of the Tsrhc Testament no longer had any ley line reactors.

The fact that Mikawa was allowed to have them meant, for the countries of the Tsrhc Testament, that they would be borrowing this forbidden power from Mikawa. Because of this, they became debtors in exchange for the ability to mass produce goods that had undergone ether treatment through the output of the reactors.

The output of the modern ley line reactors had been heightened, and the area of the ley lines it affected was also bigger.

If several of them overloaded...

Masazumi did not say those words, but she said this instead.

“...Let’s hurry to a place where we can ascertain the truth.”

The moment she said it. Suddenly, a light came from behind her.

“!?”

Turning to face the voices of surprise from the crowd, she saw that the light shining from the ground of Mikawa was stronger. It looked like moonlight, but it was clearly some luminescent phenomenon.

“Are those fireworks?”

No, that word wouldn’t leave her mouth.

A sound came. The sound of the entirety of space screaming, as if the atmosphere itself had a voice.

The next instant, the thunder of Mikawa cracking apart made the world quake for the space of a heartbeat.

•

In the midst of the night, Mikawa started to split apart.

Only one place hadn’t split apart. It was the black rectangle in the heart of Mikawa, New Nagoya Castle.

Of the rectangle that made up New Nagoya Castle, the area around three of the corners, the southwest corner excluded, was shining brightly.

The light erupted outwards from the three points on the castle. The castle at its center, the surface of Mikawa burst out over an area ten kilometers in diameter, bringing light into being. It was a movement that brought the pulsing to the surface, like capillaries popping up.

The vast amounts of light ran across the surface in an instant, and leaping into the air, it gave rise to a mist and forest of beams of light.

It climbed.

The three gods of war that flew through the nighttime skies stalled as soon as they came into contact with the mist of light that formed a half-sphere in the skies above Mikawa and the clumped up beams of light that was shaken by the heartbeat.

Gods of war are armored warriors that move using artificial joints and the drive system. It is piloted, so upon insertion, the armor disaggregates the pilot into information, and it moves through the streaming of information into the machine’s drive-management systems and nerves. By doing this, the pilots can

handle the machine body as if it were their own.

However, the altitude of the three machines dropped suddenly. Panicking, they flipped their armored selves over, taking control of their posture.

“...My energy output’s suddenly been consumed! The unification has been canceled!”

In a panic, the three machines beat at the wind with their wings, straitening themselves. They had opened up divine communications to each other.

“—When you touch that light, your energy output is drained...! This is because of the core of the light, New Nagoya Castle’s ley line reactor! The ley line reactors are sucking up ether from the ley lines without any limits!”

“If that’s true, does that mean that this light isn’t being emitted from the ley line reactor but being absorbed by it, and is converging there...!?”

“That... Isn’t that the representative pattern for the collapse due to the overloading of an ley line reactor...!?”

Currently, the ether running through the ley line around Mikawa was streaming towards New Nagoya Castle. As such, the assembled ley lines were shining, expanding and splitting the earth.

The three machines fled, flapping away from the expanding light.

“The protective layer of the molla benzina and the vestido made for aerial usage are thin, so they are more easily interfered with by the ley lines! —HQ, in this situation, we cannot go in. Please review our orders.”

“This is Base1, head towards the god of war squadron, Gran Muñeca. Currently, it is proposed that the god of war squadron takes point for the batallion responsible for the destruction of the ley line reactors. Do the field operatives have any suggestions?”

“If we’re going in, then we’d like to be fitted with equipment buffered against the ley lines, but we don’t have time to exchange parts. Just prepare the weaponry and upper layers of armor able to cover our entire body. Equipment that’s able to destroy New Nagoya Castle is...”

“Because it’s impossible to completely destroy New Nagoya Castle’s ley line

reactors with god of war class armaments, the probability of an explosion of the accumulated ether has been identified.

“To release the ether accumulated in New Nagoya Castle’s ley line reactors, we have judged that we need to completely and instantaneously destroy the reactor or interrupt the purification process by setting a large number of explosives.”

“Gods of war are unsuitable for both, huh. Please prepare weaponry to clear the path of the infiltration team. Since the air superiority guns we are currently equipped with are specialized for long-distance battles and have as such very low tracking capability in close ranges, we’re unable to respond appropriately to the mid or close range battles that dominate street battles. Also, blade-type close range weaponry and equipment to move through buildings is necessary. You’re able to arm us so that we can get through the walls of New Nagoya Castle, right?”

“Tes.” The answer came over the divine communication.

“We will do as you request. In the current situation, as regards the interference from the ley lines...”

“Cover the upper plates of the anti-ley line interference armor with kinetic dynamos. We’ll deal with it by raising the isolationist properties of the armor’s mobile state. Because the power output has lowered, we are unable to perform anything but anti-surface combat, but safety is confirmed. We should be able to fully fulfill our roles as long as we’re just acting as the vanguard and assault support. We’re changing our upper plates and rearming, so we’ll finish that up and meet up.”

“Tes, then, a1 and a2 will act as the vanguard and assault support. a3 is armed for information warfare, so please stay above the ether light and collect information while supporting from that location.”

“—Tes! Come, a2! The faster we are, the longer our turn will be! a3, circle around up here! Since you’re a newlywed, a place at the top of the world is just right!”

“Being in a place where he’ll die if he falls is a married man’s life, isn’t it?”

“Haha.”

The sound of laughter echoed through the divine communication, and two gods of the war flew to the west.

The person on the divine communication from headquarters took a breath.

“—Attention, all units. 2036, the objective of the Tres España battalion stationed in Mikawa is the stopping of the ley line reactor in Mikawa’s New Nagoya Castle. After the god of war squadron has secured the way forward, the battalion, centered around the assault team, will infiltrate New Nagoya Castle. They will then destroy a single ley line reactor and use the ensuing leakage of ether in order to forcefully dissipate the accumulation of ether, which is reaching levels of overload. In this way, they will stop the overload. Furthermore, this is something that has not been recorded in history recreation, but...we judge that this is the most dangerous incident of the Tres España battalion stationed in Mikawa. Everyone, please obey the contents of the communiques coming from your superior’s divine communication.”

And...

“Tes!”

As if to respond to the nods through the divine communication, a movement from the west was born.

Two of Tres España’s escorts ships approached the stable stretch of land and air that ran along the waterway in the west of Mikawa.

“Assault team B, team C, disembark onto the stable ground—”

However, before the divine communication could receive confirmation, the two ships suddenly received a response from Mikawa.

The leading ship took cannon fire to its port, and it sunk instantly.

That which had fired the cannon that had pierced the hull was a single automaton, standing above the rooftops of the village, which quaked as it split and collapsed while light shone from it.

The information officer of the ship that had been sunk confirmed the identify of the automaton of unknown model, who carried a long shadow which seemed

like an anti-cruiser cannon, as “Kazuno”. He sent this information to all his comrades, including those that had evacuated the ship right before it impacted the ground.

After a few minutes, the two gods of war that had secured their equipment at the headquarters came hurrying from the western skies. In order to check the safety of the trailing ship and the assault team members, the two machines entered the battleground of the automaton platoon that Kazuno commanded.

They moved out.

The battle between the collapse of Mikawa due to the ley line reactor, Tres España, who was attempting to stop it from happening, and Mikawa’s automatons, who were hindering Tres España, had opened.

However, there was a question going through Tres España’s divine communications. The question was this:

“Why are they doing this?”

They were screaming.

“This overloading of the ley line reactor, which will most likely annihilate Mikawa... Why are they doing this!?”

Chapter 17: Usurper in the Street

CHAPTER 17

"Usurper in the Street"



Something that holds not the figure of a human yet is a human.
Something that takes the figure of a human yet is not human.
What can we call the chance meeting of the two.

Point Allocation (Battlefield)

Something that holds not the figure of a human yet is a human

Something that takes the figure of a human yet is not human

What can we call the chance meeting of the two

Point Allocation (Battlefield)

•

In the nighttime sky, the sky where two moons hovered, a ship had moored.

It was an aerial ship emblazoned with the emblem of the Far East, Musashi Ariadust Academy; the leading ship of the group that had been advancing towards the west. It only had one cannon, which was mounted on its bow.

The ship had stop signals created with an illumination spell placed by its flanks. It stayed unmoving in the sky.

The lights in the bridge, which was located towards the stern of the ship, were lit up.

A flight map was spread out on the work table in the middle of the bridge; and several people, the ship's captain included, were speaking to each other as they stood around it.

A single girl stood amongst them. Her hair was tied up behind her head.

The captain spoke to her.

"Futayo-sama...what should we do? Should we go on ahead to the border or go back? According to the Testament Union's divine communications, Mikawa is currently in an emergency situation. The ley line reactors have started to overload, and the Testament Union has tried to ascertain the cause. The automatons are resisting their efforts."

"I see."

Folding her arms, Futayo nodded.

I want to reach a decision concerning what we should do now, but we cannot simply move when the Testament Union is involved. I wish there was someone here that was both decisive and good with politics.

...If only Masazumi was here...

Such a wish will never be fulfilled. Even as she thought of her classmate, Futayo understood this.

If she is a vice president at Musashi, then as always, she is probably doing her best using her knowledge and decisiveness.

However, at this moment, she was not here.

“Well then,” Futayo said. Though she was interested in the fates of Kazuno and her father, she did not show it.

“The important thing is what we should do for the good of the Far East. However, I am unfamiliar with this. Is there someone who could tell me?”

Hearing Futayo’s question, the captain looked around at everyone. His gaze landed on the vice captain of the escort squadron.

“Under your role as an adviser, do you have any opinions, Vice Captain?”

The well-built vice captain nodded in response to the question.

“If the overloading of the ley line reactors is intentional on Mikawa’s part, Mikawa’s status as the Far East’s representative will be taken away; but Mikawa won’t disappear.”

“If what you’re saying is true...”

“Judge, there’s the possibility that Mikawa has parted with the Far East and will come under the control of the Testament Union. In this event, Musashi will also eventually come under their control, and any real substance of the Far East will be gone...”

Hearing those words and seeing his gaze covertly flick from face to face, everyone looked at each other.

Seeing all those expressions enter her field of vision, Futayo realized that everyone was thinking the same thing. As such, in order to ascertain this, she said this: “...As regards the current situation, what are the advantages of the Testament Union taking control of the Far East and Musashi?”

“There are many.”

The vice captain started by saying this.

“This could be the solution to the division between the people of the Far East and other countries living within and without the harmonic territories. In addition, due to the circulation of money and their complete control, the people of the Far East will be concentrated in certain locations. Also, they’ll be able to usurp Musashi’s trading powers and technical skills... This depends on the level of their control, but the worst case scenario for us is their best case scenario.”

“If so...” Futayo said.

“Then we are the ones that can step between the Testament Union and Musashi... We are people of Mikawa, and because of this we have the strength to support Musashi’s views without colluding with them.”

“Then...”

The ship’s captain said. He exchanged looks with the on-board head of divine communications.

“Contact the Testament Union. Tell them that we want them to use us if there’s an emergency. Even if the Testament Union does something to Musashi, they won’t want to commit the mistake of bringing people from other countries aboard.”

“Judge.”

The head of divine communications turned towards the divine communications systems. It was then that the ship’s captain said this.

“Well then, this vessel will wait. We will await the Testament Union’s response. Futayo-sama, according to the situation, this may seem like we are going against how we truly feel, but...”

“Judge.” Futayo nodded and smiled. A smile that she herself felt was forced. In addition to this, she spoke thus: “Loyalty...it is in such behavior that we see its meaning.”

Hearing those words, the ship’s captain nodded after a moment. Besides him, the sailors and the vice captain of the escort squadron also nodded and bowed.

...Thank goodness.

Futayo felt relieved that at the very least she had not said something wrong.

It was at that moment.

Having intercepted a divine communication, the head of divine communications screamed its contents at her.

“—Tres España’s vanguard has entered Mikawa! They’re heading towards New Nagoya Castle, gods of war in tow!”

A breath.

“According to their estimates...there’s 15 minutes until the overload of the ley line reactors is set!”

•

The nighttime village was painted with light and darkness.

The darkness had two forms: the darkness of the night and the shadows of the houses and cracks in the earth.

There were three types of light. One was the light coming from within the houses. Another was the light of the ley lines, coming forth from the depths of the vast cracks that split the crust, where the roads, the waterways, and the houses were built. The last light was this: “—!”

The light of shots continually fired along the surface.

Of course, there was a certain sound that accompanied the barrage of bullets.

This was the overlapping sound of guns and cannons.

Finishing off the confluence of sound was the sound of a heartbeat, reaching out from below the earth.

Every time the periodic pulse rang out with a noise that shook all things, the fissures that ran through the surface spread, moving as if they were in search of air; and the light that could be seen in the depths of the earth grew stronger.

Darkness and light painted the village, and sound traveled within them. Something was moving as if to cut through the pulse, that pushed upwards.

“a1, we’ve started to take point!!”

Shouting and accelerating down the streets, the god of war was an armored figure in white and crimson, half its height again taller than the roofs of the village. Four wings in the style of a cross were on its back, and a rifle the size of a cannon was wielded by its right arm.

The leader of the god of war squadron, a1, looked forward. At the end of his vision was the straight line that made up a street; and beyond it, the colossal New Nagoya Castle that lay in the depths of the town.

He went.

Because it was originally meant for aerial usage, the crimson and white mechanical body had no legs. However in its stead, the god of war extended graviton particles from its legs, running on the virtual feet that this created.

The street was the shortest path. Despite this, it was the path that the enemies were targeting.

However, the warriors of the assault team were behind him and starting to advance with a2.

Going first and drawing the enemy out was his duty.

“—!”

a1 expelled the air that had been stored to the limit within its wings.

Pressed forward by the resulting explosion of air, a1 burst forth in a straight line forward. Chaining some shots from his cannon, he blew apart the enemies that came within his automatic targeting sights. Even as he did this, he simply continued straight on, scattering white papers in his wake.

For the sake of clearing the path that led to the success of the operation...

He gusted down the road at the lowest of altitudes.

•

Maintaining his initial velocity, a1 led the way, ahead of the main group by a few hundred meters.

He was within the support range of his comrades, so it should have been within the range that the land divisions could advance. Behind him, a2 should

have started up immediately, performing his duty as the land divisions' escort. As such, all he could rely on now was aerial support from a3 and his own power.

He went.

Looking at the displays of information overlaying his vision, a1 confirmed the route he was to take. Nagoya was the remains of a town. Every road, street and name was left in the state it had been found when the ruin had been discovered during the the Age of the Gods.

It was roughly three kilometers before they reached New Nagoya Castle. Currently he was nearly directly west of New Nagoya Castle, on highway 79.

If you left the town of Jinmokuji to the north and the town of Ouharu to the south and continued traveling east, you would reach the rivers Shinkawa and Shounaigawa, that flowed to the west of New Nagoya Castle.

The bridge that crossed the two rivers had a north-south orientation, but the road on the opposite bank went eastwards. If you traveled it for one kilometer, you would reach the side of New Nagoya Castle.

Heading there, his duty was similar to acting as bait. Using his speed, defense and firepower, all superior to a human's, he would lure out the enemies lying in ambush and blow them apart.

He had a rough idea of the enemies' weapons.

...Compressed lumps of metal.

Automatons have the ability to control gravity. Using that power, they harden and fire scrap iron.

The manner in that they did this could be likened to how children throw clumps of mud. However instead of dirt the ammunition were blades, nails and clamps that had been twisted and crushed into a hard mass; and their firing speed was nearly supersonic.

Of course, this work puts enormous strains on the automatons. He had already shot down tens of automatons.

“__”

No. Standing ready on the rooftops, they were in a state that could be likened

to his own busted automatic firing mechanism. Smoke and heat spewed visibly from their shoulders and wrists.

Depending on their state, there were already some that had become unable to move and were toppling off the walls of the houses, smoke rising from their arms and chests.

...*Why?*

Why is it that the automatons are fighting without fear of their own destruction?

And this is happening in spite of the ley line reactors overloading.

...*Why—?*

As he thought, a1 went. Not only was he taking care to renew his vision and the targeting sights of his automatic firing mechanism, which controlled the right arm that held the rifle, he aligned the order of his shots to the swaying of his body and feet.

There were enemies. As he went further in, their number increased.

Because of this, a1 cut through the wind, flipping his armored body and firing.

Shoot, spin, accelerate forward to dodge.

From time to time his sights would be off and he would think that he wouldn't hit.

When this happened, a shot would come from the skies and he would be saved. It was a3, in the high skies. The reason he was able to fire the long range air-superiority weaponry against the surface was because he was sharing targeting information with a1. a1 was also using a3's audiovisual information to roughly calculate the enemies' positions before firing.

He went. Even while supporting and firing, a1 simply chose to move forward.

“——”

A crossover entered his vision.

a1 evaded the cannon-fire coming from the left and right by accelerating forward, returning fire with his rifle.

The rifle was made in the short-barreled style of Tres España's government-managed industry, 'San Mercado'. It was muzzle-loaded, according to the technical specifications of the Testament's descriptions. The gun's defining characteristic was the fact that in order to reduce the charge the barrel of the gun was cut as far down as possible, and in its place it deployed a virtual barrel made with *Clásica Firma* in the shape of a cross.

Its load came in a magazine, 32 steel bullets in every one. Because of the large-scale Testament Sign contract used to accelerate the shot and the automatic loading mechanism, it could continuously fire six shots in the space of a second.

He went full auto.

The Testament Sign contracts that had been used were ejected and scattered. He had hit seven times. He had taken a bullet in the shoulder of his armor. The lump of metal had deeply gouged into the cross armor that Tres España was so proud of, but...

...It didn't reach the core.

Several other parts had also been pierced, but he went straight ahead, relying on his speed and concentration.

Continuing to shoot, a1 flapped his wings twice.

Directly behind him, warning sounds erupted from the audiovisual mechanisms situated directly behind his head. Warning signs appeared to the left and right of his vision.

ADVERTENCIA!! (Warning)

The meaning was clear. Behind him, the automatons had appeared from the houses on the left and right where they had been hiding.

They were most likely thinking of surprise attacking him from the back.

However, they were naive. a3 is in the skies. The information from the sky is being sent almost in real-time. If a1 could obtain the information of the enemies behind him, his automatic firing mechanism would adjust for them. In this case he was unable to confirm by sight; but there should not be any

problems with pursuing bullets.

There were none.

Leaving it to the mechanism, his right hand, which held the rifle currently swung behind him, squeezed the trigger.

Three direct hits rang out, and the warnings disappeared. He could see the pieces of paper scattering in the corner of his vision.

At that moment, a divine communication came.

“a1! —The enemy has moved! She has horns!”

He had already entered a battle situation with the enemy. Ignoring that, the person that should be designated as his “enemy” was...

...Could it be—!?

A warning sign flashed into being at the right of his vision. The sign transmitted the name of the hostile machine’s name.

“—Kazuno!!?”

•

Above the streets of Nagoya, which had been protected by the environmental gods during the Age of the Gods, a god of war and an automaton clashed.

In terms of their relationship to each other, the god of war was accelerating and chasing Kazuno who was ahead of him and drawing further away.

However, though an automaton’s athletic ability is high, it cannot match a god of war.

If the god of war went all-out it would not take even one minute to reach their destination, New Nagoya Castle.

Despite this, the ether disturbance was swirling around the skies like a storm and the god of war could not fly to its full capacity. As if she had expected this, the automaton braked, challenging the god of war to a land battle.

Kazuno was using two weapons.

The first was her skill in battle, kept in her mind.

The second was gravity control and the multitudes of weapons and battle techniques that could be created with it.

“—!”

Kazuno shouted while running backwards.

“—By the luck of my fingers, a sword!”

Running in a manner where it was almost like she was leaping, Kazuno shouted. She brought both her hands downward.

Simultaneously, the ground erupted because of her gravity control.

And what had been made was a pair of broadswords built from the road, no less than seven meters in length.

The twin swords instantaneously rose up into the air, following the movements of her arms.

However, the god of war she was facing moved.

The white and crimson god of war readied his rifle, not slackening his speed.

He fired directly after.

The shot that could be said to be an artillery shell barreled towards Kazuno's chest as she was in the midst of raising her swords.

The muzzle sound rang out and the shreds of the contract scattered into the air.

The bullet hurtled down a straight line. Yet...

“—By my gaze, a shield!”

Responding to Kazuno lifting her chin, the ground between her and the god of war leaped upwards.

It was a shield.

However, the road's structure was based on gravel so it was weak against impact.

The 10 cm thick shield-wall hovering in the air was torn through by the steel bullet.

The piercing bullet continued to come.

It did not pass all the way through. Since that was the case, countermeasures should be simple. Kazuno quickly forced her gaze, which had been turned upwards, down.

“—Placing an additional order!!”

Seven shields stood up in succession and flew between Kazuno and the god of war.

The metal bullet collided with the seven shields floating in midair. It hit. It broke. It burrowed. It pierced. It shattered, it ripped apart, it went in, it pierced through, but...

“I have judged that it has stopped!!”

As her voice rang out, the shell, having been stopped by the succession of shields, ricocheted behind her. Lowering her arms as if to flap a pair of wings, she thundered the two swords hovering in the air into the god of war, attacking from the left and right of the half-destroyed shields.

As they came hurtling down, the blades lost half their thickness. As if being crushed by a steamroller, the swords were flattened from the base to the tip.

This was compression done by gravity control. By doing this, she increased the hardness of the swords.

And they sliced into the god of war.

In response the god of war brought the rifle up, connecting it to the link on its back. Both his arms free, he grasped the short swords in his waist. Still running, he drew the short swords into both of his hands. Holding them in a backhand grip he swung the swords upwards, completely breaking apart the shields that lay between them.

He broke through.

The gravel stained with black scattered into the air, and the two short swords collided with Kazuno's twin blades.

Sparks flew.

“—!”

•

The sound of metal clashing screamed twice. It was certain that Kazuno's twin swords had slowed the god of war's movements.

Even as they matched blades, Kazuno and the god of war continued to sprint.

Sparks flew between the weapons of the two as they locked blades, lighting up the night.

Immediately after, the god of war stopped low.

“A marionette playing the puppeteer to a bunch of swords? Like hell!”

An explosion of air burst from behind the god of war. It was the acceleration of its four wings.

He came.

Keeping a slight distance between them the god of war deflected Kazuno's twin blades outwards not with the strength of his arms, but the strength of his entire body; thrusting her forward.

“...!”

Continuing onward the god of war swung his body, moving it forward in a tackle headed towards Kazuno who was hanging in the air.

They were facing each other. Kazuno pulled back her two airborne swords, bringing them to bear again.

But she was too late. In order to swing the broadswords, she had to pull them back extremely far. Afterward, it would take time to slash with them. As she was withdrawing the broadswords, the god of war's short swords were stabbing towards her left and right.

At that moment, a clear sound rang out.

It was the sound of Kazuno's broadswords cracking, splitting directly in the middle into two pieces.

Kazuno shouted the reason that caused both her weapons to crack in two.

“—I am recreating them!”

Split into two pieces, the broadswords on her left and right were reformed by her gravity manipulation.

Their shapes were altering towards that of a short sword. Four of them.

At the same time Kazuno swung both of her arms even while sprinting, catching the four blades in her gravity control.

All she had to do was swing. These weapons, able to be handled in a more compact manner than the broadswords, were now headed towards the god of war's short swords; challenging them to a direct confrontation.

The god of war accelerated to meet the attack. The first round of blades collided.

“...!”

However, after the space of a heartbeat a chain of attacks commenced from both sides and the shrieks and sparks of swordplay continued.

“Oooooohhh...!”

Something that went down the street and someone who pulled back along the street. Even as each of them were receiving their comrades' support, they were trying to consume the flow of battle, the attacks and counterattacks as the main course.

The four short swords scratched away at the god of war's armor while his pair ripped the automaton's clothing to shreds.

The sparks flying off illuminated the damage and results of their exchanges before fading away.

Kazuno's body was visible beneath the remains of her shredded clothing. Her skin, made out of a material like porcelain, was wrapped with something that looked like bandages. It was a cloth charm imbued with a Shinto spell giving it a cooling effect.

Kazuno accelerated further without her body heating up. Despite this...

“...!”

When she increased the number of her attacks, the god of war went all out on speed.

And the result could be visibly seen; all their movements and their speeds were closely matched.

Both of them would step in and out, leaping here and there; and layered onto these movements were the dance of their blades.

Their speeds increased every time the sparks of deflection and sounds of rejection came into being.

They sprinted forth.

They spun, they swept inwards, they leaped backwards.



The trail of their opponent's swords would dart into the air that they had been occupying just a moment before, cutting through the air.

This held for both of them.

They went. They passed under the overpass. And they entered into its shadow.

“—!!”

The moment they did, the overpass above them was sliced into by the collateral damage from their slashing and it collapsed.

However, the two of them had removed themselves from the space that the building materials were falling on after being shredded.

They continued to run, their attacks unending.

Direct attacks were deflected. When attacks were slightly off, they were dodged. She spun, twisting her body as if dancing.

“—!”

She launched a flurry of blows. However...

“—a1, this is a2! Seven minutes have passed! Only eight minutes are left!”

“I'll leave the rest to you and a3! Also...don't talk to me until the order to retreat is given!”

“Yeah!”

That voice spilled from the god of war.

He went.

•

The god of war thrust himself forward, cutting through the wind. He jabbed the short sword in his right hand at Kazuno.

In response Kazuno thrust her arms outward, counterattacking with her four short swords.

With two of the four short swords she deflected the god of war's right-hand sword upwards, the other two heading to smash his right arm down. By slipping

her swords under the god of war's right arm, the movement would strike them upwards.

Directly after, the god of war exhibited a single judgement. Just before his right-hand sword was snapped upwards, the god of war took his hand from the blade.

The god of war's short sword was flicked away, dancing through the air as the sound of metal accompanied it. However, his left arm was left where it was.

And then the god of war did this.

"Uooo...!"

He extended the fingers of his now free right hand.

"...oh!!"

Before the blades could cut into him, his own right hand grabbed hold of them.

He had grabbed them such that his wrist and forearm armor were the first to be hit; but the two blades dug into his hand, piercing about halfway into his steel palm.

Still, he was able to do it. It was a rather forceful method, but it could not be denied that he had sealed half of Kazuno's blades.

The god of war did not stop there.

Adjusting his grip on the short sword in his left hand, he threw it at Kazuno. Snapping his wrist from below, it was a high-speed underhand throw.

An action similar to discarding his weapons.

Yet, Kazuno had to react.

She used the two swords that had not been pinned down to repel the throw.

Simultaneously, the god of war used the left hand that he had swung up from below to grasp the rifle on his back.

The cross-model virtual barrel had already been deployed.

The distance between them was short. She was in a location that he was sure

to hit.

The tip of the rifle caught hold of Kazuno's face.

The god of war's optical mechanisms definitely saw the automaton's face.

It was frowning.

It would work.

Even if shields were brought up from the surface of the road, he had held the right hand that pinned down two of Kazuno's swords below his rifle. His right arm would probably be fractured by the shields that sprung up, but he would be able to fire while he was able to stand it.

As he predicted, the ground between the god of war and the automaton burst upwards in the same manner as the shields had before.

It was too late.

The god of war squeezed the rifle's trigger.

White scraps of paper were ejected from the slot for paper disposal.

"...Hit!!"

•

Kazuno saw the shell come.

However, in response to the warhead flying her way, she did not choose to dodge or in fact, anything of the like.

She chose to perform a two-pronged attack.

The first attack used the two short swords that were still living.

"It is possible to judge that it will hit...!"

She jammed them into the barrel right before her eyes.

She melded the blades she had used in the attack, compressing them. By making the two into one, she further hardened it.

"As my hands have directed!!"

The shell impacted the blade.

Due the explosion, the air ruptured, and the melded blades were shattered.

The shell was still alive.

However, the barrel had bent because of the impact.

To the right. The shell flew past Kazuno's head.

Kazuno's black hair scattered into the night, but the bullet did not hit.

However, the shots did not stop at one. There were still bullets left in the magazine, and the god of war's rifle could fire six times in one second.

Before her eyes, the second shot was about to be fired.

At that moment, Kazuno thundered in her second attack.

It was not an attack using short swords. What she used were the fragments of the road that had burst upwards below the god of war's right hand.

And what she had constructed was a single weapon. It thrust upwards, as if it had been thrown into the air.

"This is...!?"

Between Kazuno and the god of war, a cannon made of the road's construction materials had been created.

The tip of the cannon was aimed towards the god of war's stomach.

Ammunition had been prepared, sitting ready at the other end of the cannon. This was the shot that Kazuno had stopped with the succession of shields, and had been deflected behind her. However, the fact that the bullet was now here meant one thing.

"—Could it be that you hadn't thrown it away but had instead kept it behind you using gravity control!?"

"...Judge. My possessions are dear to me!"

The shell which had been stopped by the successive weak shields had not undergone a large change in its shape.

She loaded. The bottom of the cannon closed, and Kazuno's right hand was flung downwards.

The next instant, from the bottom of the cannon to its tip an undulation burst forth.

It was accelerating.

Using gravity control to chain together multiple bursts of acceleration at high speed, Kazuno drove the shell forward multiple times.

The god of war faced this.

“—!!”

Before he could squeeze the trigger...

“—By my gaze, hit!!”

It impacted him.

•

The god of war realized that he had received a heavy blow to his stomach.

His whole body rocked with the impact, and he was left unable to put power into any of his limbs.

His fingers fell from the rifle, and his knees dropped. Warnings notifying him of the destruction of his stomach armor and the heavy damage to the exoskeleton were being displayed in his optical mechanisms.

Despite this, the god of war screamed.

His words were released into the air.

“Shoot...!!”

As his voice rang out, something appeared behind the god of war.

It was the mechanical body of the other machine, a2, who had been following from behind.

a2 stood up from behind the god of war who was kneeling and readied his rifle.

•

a2 went.

...This is our fight!

He had been advancing together with the assault team, but he had left them behind and went ahead.

There was a reason for this. When he had told a1 that he would support him, a1 had stopped. However, at that time a1 had definitely said this: *...“I’ll leave the rest to you and a3...”*

Why did he ask this of both of the people supporting him?

This was not a battlefield where he had the time to ask him about what he meant.

Therefore, a2 acted on his own decisions; and as a result, a1 shouted a plea for him to fire without even turning back to look at him.

And a2 was where a1 wanted him to be, doing what a1 wanted him to do.

He had dropped his waist, leaving his body in a crouching position. His rifle was placed against his hip, ready to fire.

It had accurately placed Kazuno within its sights.

Behind a2, the surface forces were coming. All seventy-one of them were using Clásica Firma that enhanced their physical capabilities, and were following him. Some distance had opened up between them, but as a result of a1’s advancement the enemies up till this point had almost all been dealt with.

That being the case...

...the problem lies before us!

Our time limit before infiltration is seven minutes. As our current position is a kilometer and a half from New Nagoya Castle, we don’t have the time to stop. Therefore...

“a3...! Support me!”

His aural mechanisms heard the footsteps of the surface forces, who had come running up from behind.

Sending a scout to run ahead of them, the platoon had formed an elliptical formation and was approaching at high speed.

a2 depressed the trigger. The automatic firing mechanism had entered its adjustments, but he kept aware of his own movements.

He squeezed.

At that moment...

a2's aural mechanisms heard a voice. It was a man's voice.

"A heavy god of war from Tres España, 'El Azor', huh. Also, the surface forces are over there. Kazuno, don't move, alright? ...I'll bind them."

The next instant, the god of war 'El Azor' a2 saw this:

A man holding a spear was standing behind Kazuno.

Apparently having realized that a2 was looking at him, the man swung his spear to the right.

A movement that cut nothing but air.

Yet, two strange things occurred.

The first was this: many miniature signframes displaying several words could be seen around the tip of the spear that the man had swung.

The second was this.

...My finger.

It wouldn't move. The finger touching the trigger of the high-powered rifle in my hands could not, no matter how much I tried, squeeze it.

That was not all.

Behind me. The footsteps of the assault team that had been approaching until now came to a stop.

What's happening? Why is that neither my fingers nor their footsteps are moving?

The instant the question entered his mind...

A voice spoke one more time.

"—Bind, Tonbokiri."

The man who had swung the spear spoke.

Immediately after, a2's eyes saw that his right hand and leg had split.

•

“—!?”

As Kazuno watched, beyond a1 who was already on his knees and unmoving, a2, the other machine, fell to the ground.

a2 fell, still unable to comprehend why he had been taken out. His right elbow and knee had been torn apart.

It had been caused by a single blow that had cut halfway into the afflicted areas from the front.

No strength entered the arm that had wielded the rifle, and there was no longer any support in his knees which had held up his crouching position. The artificial tendons unique to heavy gods of war from Tres España were made out of fine wire coiled into cylinders. They had been severed more than halfway through, and all the winding Drive Tool did was make the dry noise of a whistle.

The wire's lubricant spilled from his two legs like blood, forming a viscous puddle on the ground.

He fell. A voice spilled from his external vocal mechanisms.

“This is...”

I can judge that you do not understand. Within the confines of her artificial brain, Kazuno thought thus.

Tonbokiri.

The weapon indicated in the Testament's description, carried by Honda Tadakatsu. It was named thus because a dragonfly that landed on its tip was sliced in half; and the Tonbokiri that Tadakatsu wields possesses a similar power.

“It severs names that reflect upon its blade.”

Everything in this world holds a name in tandem with its existence. Whether it might be an undefined name, or whether it is unnamed, it is still a name; and it

is something that indicates the body that holds the name.

By severing the name, it slices the body.

Because it cuts names, when the name it cuts does not directly indicate the body or the name is plural, the effect is lessened. The reason that it was not the god of war's body but his legs that had been severed was because that which had been cut was not the pilot's name, but the name of the god of war; and Tadakatsu was also unable to specify the god of war's individual name.

...However...

Kazuno looked behind a2.

Several figures had fallen onto the road.

The seventy one names of the surface force that had been running this way.

All of them had one knee severed.

Not one of them was an exception.

They were the same. In that all of them were clutching their knee, in that they wriggled as they tried to stand though they were unable, and in that they squirmed about, they were the same.

This was the result of the instant severing of the title "surface force".

Behind her, Tadakatsu's voice could be heard.

"—Well, that's how this is. Six minutes are left till the time limit to prevent this is over. This ended with a lot of time to spare, huh."

•

Standing in the middle of the nighttime street, filled with the pulse and light, Kazuno sighed, the breath full of waste heat.

She did not turn back to look at Tadakatsu.

"You are rather late. I am especially troubled."

"Sorry for being late... The Lord has finally finished the final preparations and entered the center."

"I was thinking about following the Lord to protect him. More bugs are

probably going to come, after all. What will you do? ...This is your last chance to pick up the souls of your comrades and run to the outskirts.”

In response to Tadakatsu’s voice, Kazuno straightened her posture and turned towards him.

Tadakatsu stood there, Tonbokiri at the ready. Looking at his face, which made her feel his ease, Kazuno nodded at him.

“Tadakatsu-sama...we are owned by Mikawa. All that is left for us is to serve the will of the lord of Mikawa, Motonobu-sama. And Motonobu-sama...”

“Told us to protect the castle. And protect it we did. Also, I’ll take this opportunity to ask since we’re talking about it already; but do you listen to what I say or what the Lord says? Even though you’re in my family, you don’t really listen to me.”

“If I listened to what Tadakatsu-sama said, my status as an automaton would be lowered. I would not clean up. I would not do the laundry. I would go to buy unnecessary weapons, books, and meat that was not even planned for dinner, and immediately after I would bring back a dog or cat and say: ‘Isn’t it pitiful!? From now onwards this is ours!’ I would explode from having become such a failure as a human.”

“I mean, wasn’t it pitiful!? Are you a devil!?”

“Yes, yes, judge, judge. This is a response well used by Tadakatsu-sama towards me, but... I wonder about that?”

“Woman...”

Hearing Tadakatsu’s words, Kazuno tilted her head. She straightened her shredded, mussed clothing, even if only the hem was left.

“I do not have experience with being blown up by a ley line reactor’s overloading, so I cannot speak accurately; but if we start running to Motonobu-sama now...”

“We won’t be able to survive, huh.”

“...Really, I cannot understand your line of thought. Tadakatsu-sama, are you a human? Are you not actually an automaton?”

“Shut up,” Tadakatsu said, replacing Tonbokiri on his shoulder.

He looked around at the area; and matching his movements, Kazuno also confirmed her surroundings.

Throughout the entire area, the sound of the pulse was becoming stronger. The distention of the surface was reaching its limit; and rather than rising up, it was time for the surface to collapse into fissures.

With the sound of buildings everywhere collapsing and the sound of the pulse in the background, Tadakatsu looked at the light all around them.

“Mikawa’s become a pretty bright town while I wasn’t watching.”

“Judge. Tonight is the first time I have noticed. When you listen to the pulsing of the ley lines for a while, it starts to sound like trance music. I can judge that it is a fine feeling.”

“Be a little more sad, won’t you? Also...you’ve decided to stay? You’re not going to go out?”

“Judge,” Kazuno nodded in answer. Exhaling, he turned his back to her.

Behind Tadakatsu, who slowly started to walk towards New Nagoya Castle, Kazuno checked whether his clothing was disheveled.

“If it were possible, I would like to change.”

“That’s because you’re wearing that kind of frilly western clothing.”

“This is a serving maid’s clothing, the racial clothing of automatons. As such, it is a grand thing. I wanted something that could be used in battle, but the Testament Union did not comply.”

Kazuno stepped forward, going to walk beside Tadakatsu.

“———”

She suddenly moved.

•

Tadakatsu heard footsteps.

Kazuno’s footsteps. Though she had been walking up next to him, she

suddenly turned to the left.

...?

Thinking that she had found some part of his clothing mussed, Tadakatsu turned to Kazuno.

Kazuno was facing left, towards the northwest.

She was not moving.

Looking closely, Kazuno was raising her left hand. Kept horizontal, it pointed towards the west.

“Kazuno?”

“What’s wrong?” Tadakatsu asked as he drew closer to Kazuno.

Kazuno moved. She lifted her right hand.

A movement that instructed him not to come her way.

“Hey...?”

Despite this, Tadakatsu avoided Kazuno’s right hand as she stood there expressionless, moving towards her left from behind.

He looked at Kazuno from beyond her upraised left hand.

A hole had opened in Kazuno’s chest.

•

By Kazuno’s chest, in her maid uniform and the skin made of pottery below it, a hole the size of a fingertip gaped open.

Tadakatsu, who had taken a look at her in order to check on her, grasped yet another fact.

There was a small, black hole pierced through the middle of the palm of the left hand that Kazuno had raised.

Furthermore, Kazuno’s head moved slightly, turning to face him.

“There is an enemy.”

Her words halted there.

Directly after, Kazuno's body shattered into fragments from her chest to her stomach, as if she had been crushed by a colossal claw.

“—!”

Moreover, across a vast area before Kazuno, countless fragments of Mikawa's earth had been chipped off.

•

The power to fragment attacked Mikawa in a barrage.

The range covered three kilometers in width and one hundred kilometers in length. There were multiple cuts, and it continued for several seconds. In effect, the crust, the surface, the streets, the waterways, the atmosphere, the night sky, and everything included within them were fragmented into pieces over a few seconds.

Sliced into as if to engrave, they were cut into and torn to shreds.

Carrying a hint of freshness, the short sound caused by the cutting and the grating sound of tearing screamed from everything within the area of effect.

The trails of the cuts changed, dependent upon the size of what was being sliced into. The crust and surface of the earth was gouged out of the ground meters at a time. Diagonal lines akin to claw marks ran across every pillar and wall of each house.

In its current state, the entirety of the town had received slashes that left gashes running throughout.

The atmosphere was the same. Accompanying the sound of tearing cloth, white lines cascaded in midair covering several meters. The next instant, those lines ruptured.

“—!!”

They screamed.

Comparable to the sound of applause, the sound of air rupturing drowned the surroundings; and the gusts of wind it raised echoed, the noise sounding like cheers.

The gashes assaulted anything and everything; the fragments that had been sliced off danced into the air, carried by the wind.

Because of clashes with the atmosphere, the portion of the town that had been sliced into faced further destruction. As if being crashed into by the waves of the sea, it was folded and crushed, cracked and burst. Embraced by the wind, the remains were blown away.

Yet it did not end there.

Even as they coalesced as waves, the air that had burst open had the duty of filling the vacuums they had left behind.

The air around the vacuums was stretched as if being torn into pieces before streaming in.

However, this too happened instantaneously. The air that accompanied this flow was cooled, wrapped by microscopic ice particles akin to mist. The next instant, it exploded in all directions.

Sound and fury reigned.

The space that had been sliced into was dyed white by the cold air.

The white faded into all directions as wind, creating a thin mist in the west of Mikawa.

Below it, within the village where the mist swirled, there were shadows.

Even as the wind howled, even as the atmosphere trembled, two figures stood within them: Tadakatsu, who embraced the remains of Kazuno; and the figure of the young man facing him.

•

Tadakatsu avoided the spatial slicing and fell back toward the Shounai River. He held Tonbokiri up in his right hand and embraced Kazuno's upper body in his left.

Someone was facing him.

It was a single young man.

He was tall and had short blond hair. His clothes fluttering in the wind were

embroidered with the school emblem of Alcalá de Henares, the primary Academy of Tres España.

And he held a single weapon in his right arm.

It was a sword over a meter long and made of black and white metal. A cannon was attached to the bottom of the sword and the needle of the analog meter located at the joint between the two was pointed about halfway up from zero.

He held the weapon such that the sword was pointed down and the cannon muzzle was pointed up.

However, that gunblade had a single unique characteristic.

Countless lines of light ran up from the muzzle and created a single holographic figure.

That figure was a barrel approximately five meters long.

The light creating the barrel slowly thinned.

The young man checked the gunblade's meter beyond the fading light and closed his eyes a bit.

“ ... ”

He lowered the sword to the right and looked behind him.

There he saw the people Tadakatsu and Kazuno had defeated earlier. What appeared to be a withdrawal unit was supporting the injured men and helping them retreat. They were being commanded by a girl with two false arms.

She nodded toward the young man while holding a god of war pilot in one arm and a member of the assault team in the other.

The young man nodded back as she left and then he turned back toward Tadakatsu.

As Tadakatsu held up Tonbokiri and embraced the automaton, the young man opened his mouth.

“I do not recognize you.” He took a breath and spoke in a clear voice. “I am Tachibana Muneshige, member of Tres España and inheritor of the name

‘Velocidad de Dios’ Garcia de Ceballos. My battle style is Strike Forcer.”

Tadakatsu spoke up when he heard that name.

“The inheritor of the name Tachibana Muneshige who is said to be the Peerless in the West!?”

“Testament. I have also inherited the name ‘Velocidad de Dios’ Garcia for gaining a reputation as a *mensajero*. Also...”

Tachibana held up the hilt at the center of the gunblade which had a cross-shaped shield.

And he spoke.

“I have been given Lypē Katathlipsē, one of the Logismoi Óplo given to Tres España. I am one of those known as the Eight Great Dragon Lords.”

“Oh!” said Tadakatsu with a nod. “You’re really on-board with this!!”

•

“Tes.” Muneshige did not deny Tadakatsu’s words. His eyes were still slightly closed. “I apologize for arriving so late.”

When he heard that, Tadakatsu opened his mouth and, forcing blood from the scrape on his cheek, said: “If you’re that sorry, how about you leave right this instant? But I guess that isn’t happening.”

As soon as Tadakatsu said that, Muneshige was standing behind him.

His movement had been instantaneous. Wind blew. That rough wind was proof that the young man had moved by at high speed. Low footsteps that also resembled a vibration sounded loudly.

And along with that wind and noise, Muneshige spoke.

“I must ask that you surrend-...”

He never managed to say “er”.

This was because the tip of Tonbokiri was thrust in front of his nose.

Multiple sign frames had already appeared in the air and Tadakatsu’s voice could be heard beyond Tonbokiri.

“Bind, Tonbokiri.”

Immediately afterward, the power of cutting shot toward Tachibana Muneshige.

●The Internal Situation of the Far East ●



"Sis! Sis! This has gotten confusing, so quickly go over the current situation in the Far East!"



"Heh heh heh. Foolish brother, I see you are forcing another troublesome task on me. Well, whatever. Make sure to rely on me, okay? This is more or less how it is."

■Mikawa Surroundings Summary Map

●Overview

:Weapon of Mass Destruction disarmament

:In the reservations prepared by each country, the Far East's culture can be maintained; but they have little autonomy.

(In each country's provisionally-ruled territories, that country's culture takes precedence.)

●Territory and Government

•Independent Territory [Aerial City Ship Musashi]

:The internal representative of the Far East.

:The Testament Union actually controls it through restricting its route and interfering in the election of the king of Musashi and the Academy president.

•Neutral Territory [Mikawa]

:The external representative of the Far East. Mikawa's ruler negotiates with the Testament Union.

:It is the representative of the Far East, but due to the Testament descriptions it is allied with P.A. Oda. As P.A. Oda has partially left the Testament Union, it is neutral.

•Non-Aggression Territory [Kyou]

:As the emperor who controls the ley lines is here, it is off limits to not just the Far East but the other countries as well.

:Kyou cannot interfere with the rest of the world.

•Managed Territory [Far East Reservations]

:Reservations prepared for the Far East people by the other countries. They have little autonomy and are greatly influenced by the other countries.

:Act as Musashi's ports to the various countries.

•Provisionally Ruled Territory

:All Far East land not listed above falls here. These areas are under provisional rule by the other countries.

:Looking at area alone, over 90% of the Far East is this.



"Well, that is more or less it. Something exciting is going on in Mikawa right now, so this could be bad. After all, it stands at the top of the Far East; so if it starts a rebellion, the Testament Union might take away Mikawa's authority and bring the Far East under its complete control."



"Eh? Isn't that bad!? Like, really bad!? Sis, I'm relying on you!"



"Yes, yes. If there is anything your wise sister can do..."

Study: **The Internal Situation of the Far East**

Toori: “Sis! Sis! This has gotten confusing, so quickly go over the current situation in the Far East!”

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The Internal Situation of the Far East

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Toori: "Eh? Isn't that bad!? Like, really bad!? Sis, I'm relying on you!"

Kimi: "Yes, yes. If there is anything your wise sister can do..."

Chapter 18: The School Teacher

CHAPTER 18

"The School Teacher"



I know what I am being asked
But why am I being asked it?

Point Allocation (True Intent)

I know what I am being asked

But why am I being asked it?

Point Allocation (True Intent)

•

Kazuno was still alive despite having her body split in two.

She could not move properly, but she did not fall to the ground because Tadakatsu's left arm was embracing her.

However, her body had lost the ether extraction ability of an automaton's heart, so she was slowly becoming unable to move at all.

...I do not have long.

But despite that thought, Kazuno could still see everything.

Muneshige was down on his knee breathing heavily five meters in front of Tadakatsu.

He had been behind Tadakatsu only a moment before, so he should have been struck by the power of cutting.

But he had not been sliced in two.

...What does this mean?

As she thought that, her body shook. This was due to Tadakatsu standing up.

And as he moved, a few points of heat fell onto Kazuno's cheek.

It was blood dripping from Tadakatsu's brow.

She heard the men speak.

"Speed, is that it?"

"Testament," replied Muneshige while still breathing heavily. "The activation system for the divine weapon known as Tonbokiri acquires the name of the target reflected in Tonbokiri's blade and then carries out the cut. Its effective range is approximately thirty meters."

And so...

“I need only to instantly escape to that distance or to a location in which the blade cannot reflect me.”

Kazuno frowned weakly at Muneshige’s words.

“How do you know that?”

When her lips moved, Tadakatsu’s shoulders relaxed.

“What? So you’re alive, Kazuno?”

“Oh? I did not think you were the type to embrace corpses.”

“No, the thing is...” Tadakatsu looked away from Muneshige. “I was using you as armor.”

“I can determine no reason to embrace armor. And if I am to be armor, this would be the better method.”

Kazuno moved her body.

She wrapped her arms around Tadakatsu’s neck and embraced him such that she covered his body with her own.

The core of her left hand had been penetrated by something earlier, so she wrapped her right hand around and grabbed her left wrist.

She looked up at Tadakatsu, but he did not look at her.

“Y’know...”

“What is it?”

“I’m gonna tease you for being so cute later.”

“How about I just strangle you now?” She lowered her voice to a whisper. “Earlier, a bullet-like field flew into my left hand and I somehow managed to send it to the side with repeated usage of my gravitational control. What was that?”

“The overdrive of the Logismoι Óplo called Lypē Katathlipsē. ...Boy, how much can you use?”

“Testament,” answered Muneshige’s voice. “With my adaptability, around 50% at once is the limit.”

Kazuno turned just her head and saw Muneshige slowly stand up.

His breathing was slowing to normal.

“Please surrender.”

“How can you say that when you’re so out of breath?”

“I was ill-prepared this time. I now know I can evade it,” said Muneshige.

“Please surrender. And assist me in stopping the meltdown of the ley line reactors. If you do not...” He used his right hand to hold the sword of Lypē Katathlipsē at a low position. “I too will use this next time. If I do, you will lose. You should understand what I mean.”

“True enough,” Kazuno heard Tadakatsu say. “Tonbokiri was a prototype for Lypē Katathlipsē and Akēdia Katathlipsē, the Logismoí Óplo given to Tres España. ...I suppose they were both tested using me.”

“Tes. Tonbokiri’s normal drive cuts its target by binding the target’s name, and its superior drive can apparently bind to and cut phenomena. ...I heard the mountain guardhouse was guarded before this rebellion began, yet it was taken without anyone realizing. You cut the phenomena of ‘guards’, didn’t you?”

Muneshige looked toward Tonbokiri. Its fuel meter was located at the base of the blade. Only about half of the red color remained.

Tadakatsu saw that, too.

“Well, I had to do it without being noticed. I can do the same thing about once more. But the normal drive can cut physical objects, so I should be fine.”

Kazuno nodded and opened her mouth. She gathered strength in the arms wrapped around Tadakatsu’s neck.

“Tadakatsu-sama. What you mean is, his is the newest version and yours is the prototype?”

“Yeah. It’s classed as a divine weapon, so they were able to get the combat proof they needed. What about it?”

“You have lost. Thank you very much. This has been a life filled with many worthless things, but I have determined that it was very broad experience-wise. And that is a breadth stretching from top to bottom.”

“Why is my armor getting all pessimistic?”

“Then please tell me how you can win.”

“Well,” began Tadakatsu as he looked over at Muneshige. “I’m older than that boy.”

“I have determined that is not an advantage once you grow too old.”

“Then I’m more important than that boy.”

“Between a young man with a future and an old man at the end of his career, which do you think holds more meaning?”

“Then... I’m cooler.”

“Yes, yes. Judge, judge.”

“Not only are you pessimistic, you’re pissing me off. Anyway, listen up,” began Tadakatsu. “I know the characteristics of that Logismoi Óplo.”

“For example?”

“Its design is lame.”

Kazuno nodded and turned toward Muneshige.

“I apologize. He is not attempting to have you lower your guard. This is what he truly believes.”

“But he’s stalling for time, is he not?”

Kazuno gasped at Muneshige’s question. She shook Tadakatsu’s neck with her arms.

“Tadakatsu-sama, that young man is a user of positive thinking. You still have your honor, so it would be best if you tried not messing up from here on.”

“You make fun of everything you happen to see, don’t you?”

Tadakatsu held up Tonbokiri in both hands.

As he did, several wet sounds fell to the ground.

The objects which had fallen to the ground like raindrops appeared dark red in the illumination of the surrounding ether light. But Tadakatsu showed no concern over that “rain” not letting up.

“Lypē Katathlipsē has three functions. The first is that of a normal gunblade. The second is the normal drive which can slice the name of anyone visible on the blade just like with Tonbokiri. The final one is its overdrive as one of the weapons of mass destruction known as the Logismoi Óplo.”

That was...

“Lypē Katathlipsē’s overdrive will cut away anything in range that has been seen in the blade.”

“Yes. When activated, the ‘ripping’ that represents sorrow is fired.”

“That’s right,” said Tadakatsu. “At 50% output, the overdrive should have an effective range of approximately three kilometers. From the looks of it, I’d say he has one shot left. It must have taken a while to store up that much.”

“One month with Henares’s ether tank, ‘El Tanque’.”

“You have one more shot. How about I tell you how you’ll use it?” said Tadakatsu. He indicated to the left and right, to the north and south, with his chin. “Y’see, the northwest and southeast ley line reactors are just barely in range from here. So you will use your remaining shot to destroy one of them. Destroying one might cause a large-scale disturbance in the ley line, but...”

“Testament. The ether extracted by the three ley line reactors will gain an escape route which will prevent an explosion. Mikawa will most likely experience frequent strange phenomena due to the saturation of ether, but I believe that is better than losing Mikawa to an explosion.”

“I thought as much.”

Tadakatsu laughed.

“But,” he said while indicating behind him with his chin. “It looks like Mikawa’s owner doesn’t agree. ...Look.”

...Eh?

With that thought, Kazuno gathered strength in her arms.

She looked over Tadakatsu’s shoulder and looked toward New Nagoya Castle behind him.

Down the straight road, she could see the western gate of New Nagoya Castle.

The large gate was opening. The gate was made up of two twenty-meter-wide, single-panel sliding doors made of sacred tree wood. Those fully opened.

And beyond that gate, the western shell of New Nagoya Castle was opened as well.

Light was spilling from within.

New Nagoya Castle was showing its inner light.

•

Through the opened western main entrance, several barrier walls had been opened as well.

Light came from that opened hole that extended in a straight line for several kilometers.

“...The supervising ley line reactor.”

Kazuno’s voice was referring to the mass of wooden walls at the center of New Nagoya Castle several kilometers away.

That supervising reactor was about a kilometer across. It was covered by an inner metal shell and an outer wooden shell.

“The four extraction reactors have already had a full meltdown and ether is accumulating.”

As Kazuno spoke, the wooden outer shell of the supervising reactor emitted lights through its gaps in sync with the pulsation. It would also occasionally swell slightly and vibrate.

But that was not all.

The ether around the supervising reactor had already transformed into a mist of light. This was creating countless rings on top of each other which altogether looked something like a diagram of the heavens.

In the center of that glowing diagram of the heavens at the center of New Nagoya Castle, a tower of light stood gently up into the sky.

It was made of the same thing as the rings of glowing mist that rotated around the ley line reactor.

The emitted light was broad at the bottom and narrow at the top. The tower of light resembled an upside down funnel.

That tower grew taller along with the pulsation, but it was also crumbling.

At the very top where it was piling higher and higher, it was slowly spilling inwards.

That fall gradually grew faster and it started to surpass the speed of the tower piling up higher.

“So when that entire tower of light falls inwards, it will cause an overload of too much ether for even the supervising reactor to handle,” commented Tadakatsu.

A voice answered him. That voice came from New Nagoya Castle’s external loudspeakers.

“Precisely, precisely. We have somehow managed to bring it this far. If you plan to stop it, you probably have about five minutes left. Now, what does Tachibana-kun there intend to do? He needs to use his time effectively.”

Kazuno mentioned the name of the person speaking.

“Lord Motonobu...”

“Yes,” replied the person standing before the supervising reactor.

He was Motonobu, the head of the Matsudaira family.

He wore an academic cap and wore a white coat over his clothes. He was holding a microphone in his right hand with the pinky raised.

And he opened his mouth before that microphone.

“Okay, people of this country! Good eveniiiiinnnnnggg!”

He took a breath and snapped his fingers. An automaton with a video recorder appeared next to him.

Motonobu held the microphone to his mouth and struck a pose in front of the filming automaton who had circled around in front of him.

“This broadcast is being sent across the entire country over the common network! All you good children need to watch your teacher who is prepared down to the smallest detail! Don’t change the channel!” He took a breath. “Today, your teacher has come to Mikawa where the ley line reactors are melting down quite splendidly!!”

•

Aboard Musashi, everyone who had gathered for the fireworks saw and heard Motonobu’s delighted face and voice from the sign frame which had appeared in midair.

“Oh, what’s this!? Is that Tachibana Muneshige-kun I see? Did you come all this way for a field trip!?”

“A field trip...?”

“Yes. A field trip to the destruction of Mikawa from the meltdown of the ley line reactors.”

As everyone watched on, Motonobu spoke perfectly casually.

“What do you think? Could there be any better extracurricular lesson?”

•

People all over the world and of all social statuses watched or listened to Motonobu with monitors or radios. He smiled with the light-filled supervising ley line reactor in the background.

“What do you think about this ley line reactor meltdown? Okay. Everyone who wants to see Mikawa’s destruction raise your hand with plenty of energy.”

Motonobu lightly jumped up and raised his left hand in response to his own line.

“Me! Me! I do! I do!”

•

No one there was able to react to Motonobu’s actions.

Muneshige, Tadakatsu, and Kazuno could not move in the slightest as they watched him.

However, people that could move entered the scene.

These people were inside New Nagoya Castle. From behind either side of the countless opened barrier walls stretching from the entrance to Motonobu, automatons entered with their right hands raised.

Taken aback, Muneshige took a slight defensive stance.

“Those are...”

Hundreds of automatons dressed as maids had appeared.

As they entered from either the right or the left of the passageway, they kept their right hands raised.

And Motonobu began walking between those raised hands while shaking his body.

“Come,” he said while shaking his head.

Only his silhouette was visible, so his expression could not be seen.

However...

“Come, come, come!”

As Motonobu walked forward, the maids who had watched him pass lined up behind him.

Both the pulsation of the earth and those many footsteps resounded loudly throughout the area.

But as those maids with their right hands raised began to follow Motonobu, they held up certain objects.

They were musical instruments. There were sheng, hichiriki, flutes, biwa, drums, san-no-tsuzumi, yamatogoto, as well as many other types of wind, string, and percussion instruments. The maids held their instruments along with a corresponding amp.

“———”

A single strike of a shakubyoshi sounded loudly.

Immediately afterward, the maids brought their instruments in toward their

own bodies.

“———!”

They began tuning the instruments.

Multiple tones and sound pressures followed along with Motonobu's raised left hand as he walked down the center. As he slowly moved his hand in an arc, the tone of the tuning instruments would occasionally rise and occasionally lower as if being drawn in. Finally, he clenched his fist and the sound quieted down.

“...!”

As Motonobu continued walking, he swung down his clenched left fist.

Immediately afterward, the automatons carrying instruments began playing and the empty-handed ones opened their mouths.

“—————”

They sang.

The tempo changed and a tsuzumi could be heard.

“Let me pass.”

It was the Song of Passage.

“Let me pass, let me pass

If I follow this narrow path, where will it take me?

This narrow path leads to the gods in heaven

Your opinion is not needed. You cannot pass through here

I have come to celebrate this child's tenth birthday

By dedicating these two talismans

Going may be easy, but returning is frightening

Can I pass despite my fear?”

The song came to an end, but Motonobu's walking did not. The inside of New Nagoya Castle was vast, so it was going to take him several minutes to reach the entrance. The musical accompaniment continued and the vocalists continued with a chorus of "ahs".

Even the pulsation coming from underground had become just one of many noises.

And then a voice sounded loudly. It was Motonobu's voice as he spoke into the microphone.

"Okay, is everyone ready!? This song and everything related to the Apocalypse will be on the test. (Point allocation: the fate of the world.) Now, everyone, do you have any questions for your teacher?"

A voice rose up in response.

It was the voice of the young man outside of New Nagoya Castle who was watching Motonobu through the Logismoι Óplo.

"Lord Motonobu!" Tachibana Muneshige took in a breath. "For what purpose are you sending the ley line reactors out of control, destroying Mikawa, and sending the Far East into a crisis!?"

"Muneshige-kun of Tres España's Alcalá de Henares. Please raise your hand when asking a question."

Muneshige responded by lifting Lypē Katathlipsē up to the right and aiming it. He was looking past Tadakatsu and at Motonobu.

But Motonobu remained perfectly calm.

"Good," he said. "Muneshige-kun, that was an excellent question, so I will ask you a question of my own: Aren't crises fun?"

•

Motonobu continued to speak.

"Your teacher often says that thinking is fun, don't I? In that case, crises have to be fun, don't they?"

After all...

“If you don’t think, you will die or be destroyed. If you don’t think really, really hard, you can’t resolve it. And that means it’s the most fun you could ever have, right?”

“ ... ”

Muneshige gulped and did not respond.

However, Motonobu scratched his head with the hand not holding the microphone and continued speaking.

“Crises are incredibly fun, but there is something even more fun, isn’t there? Okay, Muneshige-kun. What is it that you need to think even more about?”

“I do not know!” answered Muneshige loudly without a moment’s delay. “Are you trying to stall for time!?”

“Oh, an excellent answer,” said Motonobu in response to Muneshige’s refusal to answer. “You don’t know. That’s right. You don’t. And why is that? The answer is simple, Muneshige-kun. It is because you did not think. You have avoided thinking about whether there is anything more frightening than a crisis. That is only natural for a human. We don’t want to think about unpleasant things.”

However...

“You are the type who will look away and die when faced with something more frightening than a crisis.”

“ ... ”

“If you don’t want that, then think. That is what it means to overcome your fear. And Honda-kun, what is more frightening than a crisis and requires that you think really, really hard? Well, Honda-kun?”

“I don’t knowwww.”

“Okay, as punishment you must stand out on the road with an automaton hanging from your neck.”

“Wait a second, teacher. Aren’t you treating the two of us a little too differently!?”

The teacher ignored him.

“There is only one thing more frightening than a crisis to the Far East. Are you listening? That is the Apocalypse. The destruction of this world. This is the ultimate entertainment for every student in the world.”

•

Muneshige gasped when he heard what Motonobu said.

...Entertainment!?

He had heard of the Apocalypse through various routes. It seemed it really was going to happen and that no countermeasure had been taken. However...

“Fun? How undisciplined can you be!?”

“Muneshige-kun, your teacher is being serious here. I am extremely serious.”

A voice arrived accompanied by the sounds of footsteps, a pulsation, and music.

“The massive closing time known as the Apocalypse cannot wait until after class. Or perhaps I should rephrase that as you are a current student: this ‘graduation’ cannot wait until your future afterward. Do you understand? As you all face the Apocalypse, everything leading up to that has been class time. Now, tomorrow, the day after that, the time you spend awake, and the time you spend asleep are all valuable class time leading to the futureless graduation known as the Apocalypse. Once that time comes to an end and the Apocalypse arrives, you will be unable to return to your Academy and unable to even speak with your friends.”

“ ... ”

“Fun, isn’t it? Fun, isn’t it? After all, if the world is to head toward the graduation known as the Apocalypse, you need to desperately make the best use of your precious remaining time. And if you do not want to head toward the Apocalypse, you need to think so you can overturn the Apocalypse and continue past it.”

Muneshige opened his mouth in response to Motonobu’s continuing words.

“But...” He seemed defiant, but he still gave it some thought. “When faced

with the Apocalypse, I think a lot of people will feel powerless and fall into despair.”

“And what’s wrong with that? If instead of going to the Academy and complaining about how boring it is, you hole up in your house and tremble under your blanket as the Apocalypse approaches, it shows you understand that you are the type to grow afraid. At the very least, you will learn what kind of person you are before dying in the Apocalypse. And if you do nothing when faced with the graduation known as the Apocalypse,” he said, “then you are the type of person who can help make the world a boring place. To put it another way, those that wish to make the world more interesting will be desperate to defeat you, so while you fight, shout ‘the world is boring’ and ‘if you don’t like that, let’s work to make it more interesting’. Someone will surely answer your call. If you do that, even boring people have plenty of value as spectators.”

So...

“What type are you? Are you a critic who only enjoys mocking the world or are you the type who enjoys the world? Or... Are you the type who will head off to construct the world?”

Motonobu stopped walking.

He was still within New Nagoya Castle. He had reached the halfway point between the center and the entrance.

With instrument-playing maids behind him and a line of maids with their right hands raised on either side of him, he spoke into the microphone he held in one hand.

“Anyone who did an excellent job and came up with the answer will receive a reward. And that reward may be able to overturn the Apocalypse.”

That reward was...

“The Logismoι Óplo.”

•

Motonobu looked to Lypē Katathlipsē in Muneshige’s right hand.

He paid no heed to Muneshige’s eyebrows bending in confusion.

“That is not all, but for now, they are the easiest to understand. So let me say one thing. Listen up, everyone. The person who obtains all of the Logismoi Óplo...” He took a breath. “...will gain the power to influence the Apocalypse.”

“Such nonsense!” shouted Muneshige. “You are the one who distributed the Logismoi Óplo to each country! And now you are saying obtaining all of them will let you drive away the Apocalypse? Are you trying to start a war between the six countries you gave them to!?”

“Six countries? No. You mean seven countries.”

Muneshige froze in place. He frowned.

“Seven...!?” He shook his head. “Ridiculous. The Logismoi Óplo were based on the eight thoughts at the foundation of the seven deadly sins. You distributed all of those to six countries. For there to be a seventh country...”

“Oh? Listen up, Muneshige-kun. It is true the Logismoi Óplo were based on those eight thoughts, but is that really all there is?”

“What...do you mean?” asked Muneshige.

Motonobu replied with a smile.

“Those eight thoughts were also based on something. ...And what if there were nine deadly sins?”

•

A man wearing white papal vestments stood in the center of the Regno Unito’s bridge. His eyes were fixated on the lights in Mikawa visible through the window.

Pope-Chancellor Innocentius gnashed his teeth.

“Motonobu! You couldn’t have!!”

“When the eight thoughts were gathered into the seven deadly sins, the thoughts were changed to six and Phthonos – aka envy – was added. For that reason, envy is often seen as a new deadly sin,” explained Motonobu. “Evagrius, the man who discussed the eight thoughts, actually wrote of nine evils in a letter to a friend. The ninth evil not included in his eight thoughts was envy. What do you think of that? Why did Evagrius not add the deadly sin of envy to

his eight thoughts? Why did Gregory I later count envy as one of the deadly sins? Do you understand why? Do you know why? Each of the deadly sins is associated with a demon from the Age of the Gods, but...”

At that point, Motonobu placed a hand to his ear. It was as if he were trying to hear what was being said on the bridge of that ship.

And as if response, Innocentius shouted out.

“The demon associated with envy is the Leviathan!!”

Motonobu nodded within the sign frame, but Innocentius gnashed his teeth and continued speaking.

“The Leviathan is history’s greatest dragon which possesses aspects of all other monsters! Are you trying to say the ninth deadly sin, envy, is the ultimate vice that gathers together all the other deadly sins!?”

“Yes, yes. Gastrimargia, Porneia, Philargyria, Lypē, Orgē, Akēdia, Kenodoxia, and Hyperēphania all come from envying something or wanting to be something and either going too far or receiving backlash from that. ...I think Evagrius did not include that great evil in the deadly sins because he feared exposing its existence. And Gregory I added envy in an attempt to belittle it by giving it the image of a newcomer. But the people still saw the Leviathan there.”

“Then... Assuming I cannot make an additional order for my Logismoi Óplo,” shouted Innocentius. “Where is this envy!?”

“The Leviathan already exists.”

That is...

“Have you not heard the rumors?”

“The rumors?”

“Yes,” said Motonobu with a nod. “The rumors that the Logismoi Óplo are made from humans. The rumors say that is why they can use abilities based on the original sin of humanity.”

And...

“That’s true, you know?”

•

Masazumi listened to Motonobu with P-01s next to her.

What she heard was almost the same to what Sakai had told her during the day.

But it went further here.

She heard Motonobu speak and take a breath in the middle.

“Those rumors are true. ...The Logismoi Óplo use a human’s emotions as a component.”

That is...

“That human’s name is Horizon Ariadust.”

“Eh...?”

She had heard that name. It was the name of the girl Toori was said to have killed.

“Horizon. That is the name of the child who I hit in an accident ten years ago and then become the Logismoi Óplo. Last year, her soul had the emotion of Phthonos placed within it to make her the ninth Logismoi Óplo. ...Afterward, she was given an automaton body and sent to Musashi.”

That automaton’s name was...

“P-01s. That is the name she goes by as she lives aboard Musashi.”

Masazumi turned toward P-01s as she felt something cold crumble down within the bottom of her gut.

•

And everyone on Musashi heard the following words:

“The automaton P-01s, that child’s soul, is the Logismoi Óplo of envy, Ólos Phthonos.”

•

Sakai ran down a dark mountain path as if the light behind him were chasing him.

Motonobu's voice reverberated throughout the mountain and into the depths of the valley.

"That is the identity of the Logismoí Óplo and the location of the ninth one."

"I was right..."

Sakai gritted his teeth. He lowered his head slightly and spoke as if groaning deep in his throat.

"What exactly has changed over these past ten years?"

•

Masazumi looked to the side.

On the road, below the two moons, and in the wind was an expressionless automaton.

She had to have heard that broadcast, but P-01s said nothing and almost seemed not to understand the situation. She only responded to the fact that Masazumi was looking at her.

"Is something the matter, Masazumi-sama?"

And...

"I believe I heard a broadcast that mentioned my name and my identity, but..."

But she only tilted her head.

Of course, thought Masazumi.

She had no memories. Even if she knew that broadcast was about her, it would not feel real.

But Masazumi spilled out her thoughts by forming words in her heart and uttering them from her mouth.

"Why?"

Why?

"Why would you turn an automaton with a soul into a Logismoí Óplo!?"

She received no response, but the broadcast continued.

“I saw Horizon today. ...She waved at me.”

•

“I am glad that Horizon seems to be doing well.”

Someone on Musashi began running when he heard that voice. It was...

“Foolish brother!?”

Toori ran at an average speed, but for him, it was every last bit of speed he could muster.

Everyone was still gasping and exchanging glances at the truth they had heard.

As if to cut off that atmosphere of pause and confusion, Toori ran. While he was halfway down the stairs in front of the school, Kimi called out from behind him.

“Foolish brother! Where are you going!?”

But Toori gave no response. He only ran, breathed, and arrived at Remorse Way.

Everyone let out an “ah” and Toori hesitated for a moment, but then...

“...!”

He gathered speed and charged down that dark road. He swung his body to gain as much speed as he could.

“...!!”

Some of those in the crowd reacted to Toori’s desperate dash. The three figures that took action were Neshinbara, Urquiaga, and Noriki.

As those three ran and quickly caught up to Toori, Kimi took a few steps and shouted out.

“After him! Please!”

•

“Impossible!!” roared Muneshige.

Tadakatsu stood directly in front of him. In the distance beyond that man was

Motonobu.

Tadakatsu was the man who had tested the Lypē Katathlipsē that Muneshige held.

...In that case, he must have known everything.

Of the senior officials of Mikawa, the only ones not to be replaced with automatons or demoted were three members of the Four Heavenly Kings of the Matsudaira. For ten years, they and Motonobu had remained silent, done nothing when slandered by other countries, and walked a tightrope between P.A. Oda and the Testament Union.

...And amid that, they added this secret to the Logismoι Óplo!

Muneshige wondered why they would do something like that and he spoke a single answer.

“Do you think this is valuable enough to sacrifice everything from the past ten years!? Did you think it was that valuable to create the Logismoι Óplo which can influence the Apocalypse and give them to each country as sparks that could start a war!?”

“That is not all there is to this. You must not make a judgment based only on what you see directly before you. I managed to provide the world with plenty of teaching materials in these ten years. It is now up to all of you.” He took a breath. “Depending on your actions, there might be a world war. Maybe the Far East will be blamed and finally put under absolute rule. And if that happens, I am sure people will blame my guidance.”

With that great light behind him, Motonobu spoke into the microphone.

“But I do want to see the first ever world war not in the Testament descriptions.”

“I will stop you!” roared Muneshige.

“Excellent! That’s right, Muneshige-kun! An excellent answer!”

Muneshige deepened his stance while Motonobu bent backwards and raised his voice.

“Muneshige-kun! This is the answer you arrived at when you actually thought

about it! Yes. That's right, that's right. Acting based on the answer you arrived at is the most wonderful way to use your time! And the answer you arrived at was to cause a disruption in the middle of class! Even as I am distributing the teaching materials I have made, you have chosen to deny this lesson which can stop the-..."

"Lord Motonobu! Your lesson is wrong!" cried Muneshige. "I will destroy the ley line reactor, stop the ley line from running out of control, and drag you out in front of everyone!"

"Are you sure?"

After all...

"What if destroying Mikawa with the ley line is necessary to influence the Apocalypse?"

"I will simply create teaching materials different from yours. Yours are simply too inappropriate."

"I see," said Motonobu. "Normally, a student who refuses to listen to his teacher would receive corporal punishment, but lately people seem to think a teacher is at fault when he hits a student. ...So vice chancellor, you do something about it."

Immediately afterward, Muneshige felt a wind. It was an intimidating wind that seemed to push him. It was coming from...

"Honda Tadakatsu!!"

"Sure thing."

That warrior with an automaton hanging from his neck charged straight toward Muneshige.

With the light to his back, Tadakatsu's smiling mouth opened.

"I'll stop this classroom disturbance!"

Chapter 19: He who Dashes through the Air

CHAPTER 19

"He who Dashes through the Air"



Do ideas come from courage or recklessness?

Point Allocation (Victory)

Do ideas come from courage or recklessness?

Point Allocation (Victory)

•

Sounds were heard.

Swords clashed, feet treaded on the ground, and breaths were taken.

Those sounds were sent via divine transmission and heard all over the world.

“———”

There were two warriors. One of the west and one of the east. One who was young and one who was old. One with a new weapon and one with an old weapon. There were several differences between them.

However...

“———!”

The music of battle they played together created equally loud cries which were broadcast in all places.

The sounds moved, flowed, passed by, and conveyed it all without stopping. Someone standing before that broadcast spoke.

“What is going on?”

As a result of this, what would happen to Mikawa and what would happen to the world as it approached the Apocalypse? And...

“Which one will win?”

But there was one phrase none of them said: Please do something about this. The one thing none of them could do was ask for help.

After all, this battle would not save anything.

Motonobu’s voice could be heard giving one reason why.

“Yes. Even if this battle ends, that alone will no longer be enough to do anything. After this battle ends, everyone will have to do something about the world.”

So...

“This battle is the beginning. Go, Honda Tadakatsu. Ensure that the people can do something about the homework that is the Apocalypse!”

His words rang out.

“Show them where your loyalty ranks on a national level!!”

•

“Sure thing!” roared Tadakatsu in reply.

Immediately afterward, Muneshige circled around behind Tadakatsu.

This was his high-speed movement using the *Clásica Firma*.

But Tadakatsu had already begun moving. He let loose a strike to cut Muneshige off.

...I suppose this will not be easy!

Muneshige took action. He raised his speed further.

“...!”

He struck with Lypē Katathlipsē’s blade, moved back, and fired repeatedly.

However, Tadakatsu deflected all of it.

“You’re pretty fast! Can you go even faster!?”

“I can! The Testamento Firma has no limit!!”

And so he raised his speed.

Muneshige’s speed achieved acceleration with the Testamento Firma and was controlled with his body.

A Testamento Firma was normally carried out by using a spell contract obtained at a church.

A spell contract was obtained in exchange for Catholic-style devotions or an offering of Bless. By stamping the written seal of approval it would activate and disappear. Catholic contracts were disposable, but they were highly effective and did not consume any of the user’s Bless when used.

Muneshige's spell contracts were compressed to the size of a postage stamp and tens of thousands of them were stored in a cartridge below the radiator on his back. This spell had two effects.

The first was to raise the speed of his physical body.

The other...

...It creates multiple simultaneous footholds below my feet.

When he stepped on the ground in order to run, he would be stepping on those many footholds simultaneously.

Creating five simultaneously multiplied his speed by five. Ten at once multiplied it by ten.

Both of these were powerful spells, so they were not something that could be used in units of tens of thousands. However, Muneshige had used the fortune earned through the occupation he had inherited to alter the spell such that it was possible.

He had set the spell up so that it gave no thought to recoil.

Lessening the recoil would have made the spell more expensive, less effective, and more complex.

He had lowered the unit cost by eliminating that portion.

Also, he had shortened the active time so that the acceleration only lasted an instant. This had lowered the unit cost even further and allowed him to gather even greater numbers.

Those alterations allowed him to cheaply achieve high speeds with a great number of instantaneous accelerations, but his body took the full burden. It hurt his organs, affected his vision, and numbed his arms and legs.

However...

...That is necessary for an opponent such as this!

He moved.

The spell contract cartridge on his back vibrated and the scraps of the used compressed contracts scattered from the ejection port of the device. The pieces

looked like ash or scattered scraps of light. A shimmering of heat shot from the cross-shaped radiator on his back that was a part of his body cooling system. That shimmering rose like smoke made of light.

Each time the light scattered, his speed increased.

On the other hand, Tadakatsu had no speed. He was also injured.

However, Tadakatsu more than kept up with Muneshige.

...This is...

Muneshige watched Tadakatsu's movements.

His footwork looked relaxed as he swung his body and drove Tonbokiri into Muneshige's path.

Tadakatsu was constantly moving slowly backwards. However, he would lure Muneshige in to circle behind him and then turn in the opposite direction. He was moving in a repeated S pattern.

"..."

The repeated circular motion of this S movement pattern allowed Tadakatsu to circle behind Muneshige by using Muneshige's own attempts to circle behind him. And...

...He keeps getting closer!

It was a bit too late to activate Lypē Katathlipsē's overdrive.

Pulling the trigger and waiting for the virtual cannon to appear would take three seconds. Once he fired it, it would be unavoidable even if the results would only arrive after about a dozen seconds. That was why the first three seconds were what mattered.

At the moment, he would never be given those three seconds.

He wanted to do something about it, but...

"Lypē Katathlipsē! Normal drive!"

The normal drive was a small activation that scraped off anyone whose name was on the blade.

The system was the same as Tonbokiri's, so it was unavoidable for anyone reflected in the blade.

Muneshige was able to avoid Tonbokiri's slicing because he could use his speed to escape the reflection range of the blade.

However, Tadakatsu had no way of moving at high speed, so he could not avoid it.

Or at least, he should not have been able to.

"Bind! Lypē Katathlipsē!!"

As soon Muneshige gave that cry, Tonbokiri moved.

...This is...?

Tadakatsu calmly pointed Tonbokiri toward Lypē Katathlipsē's blade.

That was all.

"...!!"

With a sound like someone scratching at glass, light burst from Lypē Katathlipsē's blade.

Lypē Katathlipsē's normal drive had been neutralized.

And why?

...Lypē Katathlipsē's blade was reflected in Tonbokiri's blade!

It was a mirror.

He had used Tonbokiri's blade as a mirror to reflect the image of Lypē Katathlipsē as it activated its normal drive. That caused Lypē Katathlipsē to lose sight of its target and to cancel the effects of its normal drive when it almost sent that power into itself.

...It sounds simple enough.

But he could not do the same himself.

After all, it required reflecting the tip of the spear being swung at him. Tadakatsu had to have perfectly read Muneshige's every action. If the angle had been off even slightly, he would have been struck by the technique.

But Tadakatsu had pulled it off.

“Kh!”

The word “skill” appeared in Muneshige’s mind.

...That is not something one can do with speed alone!

Muneshige had the greatest combat speed in Tres España.

According to the Testament descriptions, Garcia de Ceballos whose name he had inherited had been a man of the postal system. Muneshige viewed that power as being one of high-speed movement and actions. While studying the military arts, he had also earned a fortune supported by the Testament descriptions by working as a *mensajero*.

However, after many twists and turns, he had trained as a warrior and gained Tachibana Muneshige as a double inherited name.

For that reason, Muneshige had possessed the power of speed before he began fighting.

With his speed, he could move to a more advantageous position.

With his speed, he could increase the force of his attacks.

With his speed, he could instantly evade any attack.

After training both his speed and combat skills, he had appeared on countless battlefields and learned to control that instantaneous speed so that it did not destroy his body.

His results in battle were appropriate for the man the Testament descriptions called the Peerless of the West.

...However...

The man before his eyes was handling him without that speed. That man had no spells or anything. In that case...

...What is this!?

Muneshige had obtained a single thing to live up to being the Peerless of the West.

“Kh!”

He raised his speed.

The shimmering of heat rising from the radiator grew thicker and the amount of scraps from the compressed contracts grew.

He felt as if his feet were stepping on thick books. It felt as if those books were sticking to, sinking into, and staining the bottom of his feet. The multiple footholds interfered with each other and vibrated but still produced their effects.

Repeated metallic-sounding noises came from the bottom of his feet and produced speed.

“...!”

As he accelerated as if struck, his bones creaked. The flesh on his cheeks, upper arms, thighs, and calves was all pinched and tugged backwards.

But that was the evidence of his speed.

He circled around Tadakatsu to the left and drove his sword toward the man, but...

“...!”

Tadakatsu rotated around on his S path and swung Tonbokiri backhanded from his right shoulder. That strike moved right toward Muneshige’s back as he circled around.

It was the same pattern as before. The swing of the spear was gentle and looked like it could be easily knocked out of the way, but it had definite power contained within. By the time Muneshige had avoided the attack, Tadakatsu had already rotated his body around in his S path such that he was standing behind Muneshige.

And then the S path began anew.

Muneshige could not allow it to repeat again. The more it repeated, the more time would be taken.

Tadakatsu has only one goal, thought Muneshige.

That was to stall for time.

...He wants to let the ley line reactor run fully out of control.

And so Muneshige had to stop this pattern.

But how could he stop this repeating S shape?

Muneshige thought back to his ability: speed.

That speed would not work on Tadakatsu as things were.

...In that case...

Muneshige took action as Tonbokiri was swung backhanded toward him.

He took the action he had thought up.

•

In the next instant...

“— — —”

Tadakatsu saw it.

...This is...

He saw Muneshige's idea.

He saw Muneshige's new action meant to cut off Tadakatsu's footwork which was sealing off his speed.

Muneshige took action to create a foothold.

This was the foothold he used for his acceleration. This foothold would allow him to reach high speeds in an instant. What he used was...

“Tonbokiri!?”

Muneshige stepped on Tonbokiri's blade as it was swung backhandedly.

It was a light step.

Tadakatsu felt no more movement than if a single feather had been laid on top of it.

But that foothold gave Muneshige one hundred times the counterforce.

And a noise rang out from below Muneshige's foot.

It resembled a metallic noise.

It was the sound of a Testamento Firma. As the noise came to an end, the acceleration spell activated.

A sound rang out for an instant.

And as that sound rang out, Tadakatsu thought.

...An excellent decision.

Tadakatsu assumed Muneshige intended to circle behind him like this.

...Yes, truly an excellent decision.

"But!" shouted Tadakatsu. He gripped the socket portion of Tonbokiri's extension mechanism. "Don't think a common method like that will work in this day and age!!"

As his body swung to the right, Tadakatsu dropped down with all his strength.

The spell Muneshige had chosen multiplied the counterforce of the foothold he placed his foot on.

In that case, the foothold would disappear if it was lowered down before he could step on it.

And that was exactly what Tadakatsu did.

Immediately afterward, a space was created between Muneshige's foot and Tonbokiri.

"...!"

Light ran across the bottom of Muneshige's foot and that light scattered through the air. A sound similar to shattering glass could be heard.

That proved Muneshige's spell had been neutralized.

And Tadakatsu opened his mouth.

"Bind! ...Tonbokiri!"

Long, narrow sign frames opened around Tonbokiri's blade one after another.

Those sign frames were filled with writing in an instant.

And this produced the power of cutting. He was targeting Muneshige as he floated in midair.

He took action.

But in that instant, Tadakatsu heard a new sound.

It resembled a metallic noise.

It was the sound of a *Clásica Firma*. It was the sound of the acceleration spell.

“...!?”

A roar came from the bottom of Muneshige’s airborne foot.

What had happened? What was about to happen? The answer to both questions came to Tadakatsu.

He realized what Muneshige had done.

“You used the air as a foothold!?”

•

Muneshige stepped on the air.

Stepping on the blade had not been a feint. If his acceleration had succeeded at that stage, he would have used it. However, Tadakatsu had not allowed the fight to remain at that level.

And so he had gone further.

He carried out an acceleration method he had never used before and had never even thought of before. He stepped on the air to accelerate in midair.

The method was simple.

The air was not completely empty. It had the moisture of humidity and it had the minute pieces of dust. The ley line expression and Lypē Katathlipsē’s earlier overdrive had left an abundance of dust in the air.

But that was far from being enough to use as a normal foothold.

To step on that dust and accelerate would require thousands or even tens of thousands of accelerations in an instant.

Muneshige's acceleration spell used charms. They produced massive and instantaneous effects, but put a great burden on his body.

If he went too far, it would damage his body.

But...

...I must do it!

Muneshige estimated the necessary level of acceleration on instinct alone.

"Seventeen thousand times acceleration!"

Seventeen thousand steps' worth of burden was placed on his right leg all at once.

A cross-shaped *Cadena Firma* appeared to the right of his face. It displayed a warning about the excessive burden. It said the administrative church held no liability if the spell was used like this.

He ignored it.

"...!!"

He heard a snapping sound come from his right leg.

It was the sound of his muscles splitting and bursting.

It was possible the bones and tendons had been taken out as well.

But the limb had not been severed. And as proof...

"Ohhh...!!"

Muneshige kicked off the air and accelerated.

He leaped while wrapped in the shimmering of heat and a band of light.

•

It all occurred in a succession of instants.

Muneshige traveled diagonally down and forward. He struck the ground and slid across it with his momentum.

He landed on his left leg. His heel struck and dug into the ground and he bent backwards to turn toward Tadakatsu.

He was there.

Tadakatsu had his back partially turned to Muneshige.

The tip of Tonbokiri was pointed the other way.

That blade could not reflect Muneshige.

Muneshige was convinced he had won.

“...!?”

The bottom of Tonbokiri jabbed back toward him with the force of a rapid-firing gun.

Attached to the butt end of the spear was a weapon developed by the Houzouin brand to attack behind oneself while using a spear that could not be turned around quickly. It was nothing more than a piece of metal for jabbing with the bottom of the grip, but it eliminated the opening behind the wielder.

Hitting someone with it would drive the entire weight of the spear into them, so it could easily break bones.

And that was now flying toward Muneshige's face.

It flew straight toward his position diagonally down.



Tachibana Muneshige

Tadakatsu had not turned toward him, so this attack had to be based on nothing but experience and prediction. However...

...Such accuracy!

He could never have seen that midair acceleration before and yet he had been able to see through how Muneshige would handle the landing.

How much experience did one need to build up to pull off something like that?

“Kh.”

Muneshige twisted his body and sank down. He lowered his hips and his upper body to bring himself down against the ground.

However, not all of his body lowered. The reason for this was readily apparent.

...My right leg!?

His right leg would not move. He could not even tell if the knee and toes were touching the ground. He simply felt the weight of a hot mass attached below his right hip.

His right leg failed to move and its position prevented him from lowering his hips properly. His body pitched forward.

The bottom of the spear was on a direct course for his forehead.

And so Muneshige made up his mind.

“Left foot acceleration!!”

Because of his attempt to lower himself, his left knee was bent. Because his right leg would not lower, his hips were raised.

He was in a crouching start position.

And so he shot himself forward with his left leg.

Before the back of the spear could strike him from diagonally upwards, he slipped below it.

“...!!”

The back of the spear suddenly jabbed into the left side of his angled head just above the ear. He heard a sound similar to someone scratching at his head with their fingernails. The sound traveled in a straight line to the back of his head and his flesh felt the chill of the air.

However, he made it through.

As Tadakatsu stood diagonally to him, Muneshige moved right up to the man.

He held Lypē Katathlipsē's blade in preparation to stab Tadakatsu through the gut.

But Muneshige heard a voice.

"Bind and cut. Tonbokiri."

...What?

Tonbokiri's blade was not turned toward Muneshige.

So what was he going to cut?

The answer showed itself before him.

Tadakatsu disappeared from before his eyes.

"!?"

How? wondered Muneshige as his eyes opened wide before sensing a presence to his left.

Charging at him from that direction, the north, was Tadakatsu with the automaton in his left arm and Tonbokiri held under his right arm.

Muneshige wondered when he had moved there, but then the answer came to him.

...It can't be...

"All I did was cut the 'north'! Lypē Katathlipsē's tearing can't do that! Only I can do it with the superior drive of Tonbokiri, the divine weapon of cutting!"

Tonbokiri's effective range was thirty meters. By cutting the direction of north from his perspective, he could travel the distance he had cut away, 15 meters.

"Cutting a phenomenon uses a lot of output. But it was necessary, so that's

fine.”

...That’s ridiculous!

But it was the truth.

The dragonfly-pattern fuel system on the side of Tonbokiri at the base of the blade was almost empty and had lost its color. Even with the normal drive, he only had a few uses left.

But it was enough.

This was the same.

That technique had used the special characteristics of the divine weapon Tonbokiri as a Logismoí Óplo prototype and as the possessor of a superior drive. And now Tadakatsu charged directly toward Muneshige.

“Tonbokiri!”

Sign frames were already surrounding Tonbokiri’s blade.

It was targeting Muneshige. However, he could avoid it even with just one leg. If he took a step with all his strength, he could escape Tonbokiri’s cut.

And so Muneshige took that step of acceleration. A metallic noise rang out.

“Go!”

His body blasted forward.

In the next instant, an impact struck Muneshige’s entire body.

It was too soft to call a strike. It was more like the vibration of running directly into a wall.

“!?”

What happened? he wondered in his shaken head.

He turned toward the impact that had struck his entire body. And he found...

“This is...?”

It was a wall.

A wall had appeared where there had not been one before. The wall was

made of the road he stood on.

“Tadakatsu-sama!”

It was the automaton. With Tadakatsu embracing her, the automaton had its arms free. Her right hand was pointed toward Muneshige.

Her power was gravitational control. What she had created was...

“I will surround you!” she shouted just as a dome-shaped wall surrounded Muneshige.

A sealed oblong space with no path of escape had been created. And piercing through that wall that blocked off even the sky was...

...Tonbokiri's blade!?

Just as Muneshige realized what it was, he heard a voice. It was Tadakatsu's voice coming from the other side of the wall.

“Bind!!”

•

Tadakatsu held Tonbokiri as it stabbed through that oblong dome-shaped wall.

“...”

He silently pushed it in with great strength.

This was necessary to pull the blade out of an object.

By pushing it in, he would widen the hole in the object enough to easily pull the blade out. By doing this, he ensured that he did not bend the blade or bring the stabbed object with the blade. When stabbing into flesh or bone, the tension could cause the flesh or bone to constrict, so it was especially necessary in those cases.

But Tadakatsu tilted his head before pulling Tonbokiri out.

Kazuno nodded slightly in his arm.

“I apologize for being so presumptuous as to interfere.”

“That's a special function of my armor, so don't worry about it. He's swinging

around the finished product, after all.”

“Judge. It must be difficult being so inferior.”

“Damn you,” muttered Tadakatsu.

And then light appeared before their eyes.

“!?”

It came from within the wall as if to act as the opposite of Tonbokiri.

Kazuno frowned and spoke up.

“The virtual cannon of Lypē Katathlipsē’s overdrive!?”

An automaton like her was describing the truth before her eyes as a question because there was something she found baffling.

Kazuno spoke the question even an automaton like her could not determine the answer to.

“How did he survive Tonbokiri’s cut!? Was I right and you really did screw it up!?”

“What do you mean, were you right!?”

As if in response, the wall collapsed.

The wall made from the road peeled apart from top to bottom and fell down as if it had lost its strength.

And Muneshige stood within.

However, his body had not been cut anywhere.

Instead...

“Tonbokiri’s blade is...”

Muneshige had stabbed Tonbokiri’s blade into the right side of his chest up to the base.

Tonbokiri’s cutting power activated when the target was reflected in the blade.

Muneshige had used a method to seal that power. By stabbing the blade into

his body, it could no longer reflect anything.

To drive the entire length of the blade into his body, he had stabbed it in diagonally from his right armpit and toward his back. His ribs and lung had to have been pierced, but his digestive organs and heart would be fine.

“I see. So that’s why it felt a bit odd.”

As Tadakatsu watched, Lypē Katathlipsē continued its overdrive in Muneshige’s raised right hand.

Muneshige’s pale face was turned toward Tadakatsu. However...

“He’s unconscious...”

Blood spilled from the corner of Muneshige’s mouth and his right chest by the armpit. Not long before, Tadakatsu had loosened the wound in his chest to pull Tonbokiri out. In sync with Muneshige’s pulse, blood spilled from his right chest and would not stop. However...

“Tadakatsu-sama.”

“Yeah,” said Tadakatsu with a nod.

Kazuno nodded as well.

“Lypē Katathlipsē was fired. It merely has not converged yet.”

•

“Yeah,” said Tadakatsu again. And then, “Judge. I suppose so. He’s already aimed it, so Lypē Katathlipsē will probably let loose its greatest output. That will destroy the ley line reactor behind us and bring the ley line back under control.”

“Could you cut a direction as you did before?”

“Unfortunately, I can’t fire the superior drive again.”

“Judge. You really are a useless person.” Kazuno looked up at Tadakatsu. “In that case, we must hurry. However, my gravitational control in this state is not perfect, so I cannot use the same method as before. At the very least, I cannot alter its direction in the time it passes through my arm to my chest. So...”

Kazuno narrowed her eyes. “You know more or less what must be done, do you not?”

Kazuno closed her eyes without waiting for Tadakatsu to answer. And she opened her mouth.

“Nn.”

She stuck her tongue out over her lower teeth and toward Tadakatsu’s face.

And that exposed a wet artificial tongue with a single blue jewel embedded in it.

Tadakatsu glanced at the blue jewel.

“I made my wife’s ring into the soul and...well, her sharp tongue sure stuck around.”

Having said that, he pulled Kazuno toward him. He embraced the automaton and their lips met. He ran his upper and lower teeth over her tongue, pulled back, scraped its moisture off with the back of his teeth, and filled the area below his own tongue with it.

“...”

As if plucking it off like a fruit, he bit off Kazuno’s jewel.

With the sound of fibers breaking, Kazuno’s eyebrows moved slightly and her throat moved once.

“...Nn.”

Their lips parted and their faces moved back.

Kazuno narrowed her eyes. Artificial blood flowed from her lips, so she licked it off with her tongue that was also wet with blood. Her gaze met Tadakatsu’s.

“This automaton is running in economy mode off of reserve power. If you require anything, please ask quickly.”

“Just something simple. Take care of the last order I left with Kazuno.”

“Judge.”

The automaton looked over her shoulder.

Muneshige stood there unconscious and motionless, but the light of the virtual cannon continued to grow stronger.

“Here it comes!”

Having experienced it once, the automaton was able to sense when it would fire.

In the very next instant, the automaton released her arms from around Tadakatsu’s neck.

At the same time, Tadakatsu took action. He threw the automaton into the air.

“Tonbokiri!”

As he spoke that word, it came.

“It” being soundlessness.

All that existed was a faint darkness produced from Lypē Katathlipsē’s muzzle.

This was the suffering silence before the crying and tearing.

But the automaton moved. She held her right hand up toward the muzzle of the virtual cannon.

“...!”

It was in the very next moment that a hole was opened in the palm of that outstretched hand.

The automaton frowned while twisting her body in midair. A great creaking rose from her body.

“Tadakatsu-sama!”

In response to the automaton’s cry, Tadakatsu nodded, shortened Tonbokiri, and swung it.

“Bind!”

Hearing that word, the automaton’s eyes narrowed in a small smile.

And Tonbokiri began to perform its cut.

It had a single target.

“Once the bullet is contained within the automaton, I cut the automaton with the bullet as a part of her body!”

Immediately afterward, the cutting power split the automaton in two.

“...!”

Lypē Katathlipsē’s overdrive, that power of tearing, activated over a large area.

Chapter 20: Graduates Under the Moon

CHAPTER 20

"Graduates Under the Moon"



answer
only answer
answer me
only answer me
Point Allocation (Heroine)

answer

only answer

answer me

only answer me

Point Allocation (Heroine)

•

Under the night sky, people were gathered on the ships moored at the bottom of a mountain.

Aboard those eight ships that made up a giant city, people stood on the bows of the various ships or on the long, thick ropes holding the ships in place.

Everyone was looking south, toward Mikawa.

They were all watching the great change occurring in Mikawa. And they muttered to each other.

“The light...disappeared.”

Just as someone had said, the light which had been released into the air from the earth beyond the mountains was now gone.

The distant pulsating sound which they had heard through the air was gone as well.

“What happened?”

Someone asked that question, and it spread from person to person; but no one had an answer.

As they all asked questions and expressed their doubts, Masazumi walked with an automaton.

While Masazumi pulled on her hand, P-01s had Masazumi’s coat over her head. The bottom of the coat fluttered at her back.

“Masazumi-sama, aren’t you cold?”

“I’m fine,” said Masazumi as she walked on the path to the surface shopping district. Everyone they passed was walking toward the front of the ship where

the Mikawa area was visible. However, Masazumi was hurrying away from there.

This is awful, thought Masazumi. *I haven't the slightest clue what I should do.*

She had learned a lot that day.

She had learned about Remorse Way, the Logismoí Óplo, and the identity of P-01s.

The automaton whose hand she was currently holding was not technically an automaton.

She was a human with an automaton body and based on the soul of Matsudaira Motonobu's daughter, Horizon.

But, thought Masazumi. *The Logismoí Óplo distributed to the world were created from her emotions.*

Her emotions had been used as a component to create those weapons of mass destruction which were based on humanity's original sin. Masazumi did not know why that had been done, but she did know one thing.

...The world is on the move.

The ruler of Mikawa, Lord Motonobu, was now silent; but he had said one thing during the previous divine transmission: if someone obtained all of the Logismoí Óplo, they would gain the power to influence the Apocalypse.

In that case, the person being pulled along by her hand could influence the fate of the world.

And Masazumi had no idea what to do with her. After hearing Motonobu's divine transmission, she had reflexively covered P-01s with her coat and taken her here.

...Horizon.

She was Lord Motonobu's daughter as well as...

...The girl that father and the others said Aoi killed.

She did not know what that meant and asking P-01s would not help as she had no memories.

Not knowing what to do, Masazumi had decided to ask for advice from the woman owner of the snack shop. However...

“Masazumi-sama.”

“Eh?”

Masazumi stopped when P-01s spoke to her. They were just about to enter the shopping district. They were currently in a business district, so there were not many people around.

She turned around to find P-01s with her face hidden by the coat and her bangs.

“I am not actually P-01s, am I?”

She was looking directly at Masazumi.

As P-01s stared with a blank lack of expression, Masazumi could see her own eyes reflected in hers.

“I do not know.”

And so...

“I was referred to as Horizon,” said P-01s. “But then what should I do as Horizon?”

•

P-01s’s question left Masazumi at a loss for words.

How was she supposed to answer that?

She would likely be controlled by the Testament Union and the Far East for the rest of her life. Masazumi did not know exactly how that would play out, but being the heir to Mikawa and a Logismoí Óplo was more than enough reason to rob her of any freedom.

But, thought Masazumi. *Does she want a future like that?*

The P-01s Masazumi knew was an automaton that was always standing behind the counter or cleaning the front of the store or the graveyard. She and the shop owner had searched for where she had come from, but P-01s had ultimately chosen a peaceful life and that was what the others wanted as well.

But all of that would be taken away.

“You...”

Masazumi started to say something and then had a sudden thought.

...What do I think?

She had acted based on her hopes to inherit the position given by the name Honda Masazumi, but it had been impossible in the end.

However, the girl before her eyes had been given a large role in the world even though she did not want it.

As someone who had desired a role like that, shouldn't she be jealous of her?

...And yet...

“You...”

She was Horizon Ariadust. She was Matsudaira Motonobu's heir, the base for the Logismoí Óplo, and a girl who had been made into an automaton.

But how could she be accurately described using those terms?

Masazumi knew her as nothing more than a snack shop's automaton.

And so Masazumi opened her mouth, hesitated, and tried to say something.

...You...

And just as she did, she heard distant voices.

This was a business district, so there was no one around at night. What she heard was...

“!?”

In every direction of that cityscape, she heard countless voices rising into the sky from the distant residential districts.

As if drawn by those voices, Masazumi looked up into the sky.

And she saw a giant shadow directly above in the night sky.

“Is that...?”

It was the shadow of a flying ship. It was the lead ship of the guard unit sent

from Mikawa.

•

As Masazumi saw the shadow of that ship floating in the night sky, she heard a new sound.

It came from Musashi's external speakers. The amplified voice of an automaton spoke into the air.

"Musashi bridge to lead guard ship. You have left your scheduled course. Also, ships are obligated to remain more than six hundred yards from each other. That is all."

However, the automaton's warning did not stop the approach of the guard unit's lead ship.

Instead, the ship replied with a slightly staticky voice.

"Mikawa-owned Musashi lead guard ship to Musashi. We are here on emergency duty given by the Testament Union representative for this land. If you have any complaints, send them to the K.P.A. Italia contingent as they are the aforementioned representative."

The guard ship reduced its speed and lowered down from above.

A number of ropes dropped down from its deck and over its side.

Figures stood on the edge of the deck above the ropes. They were armed and wore Far East uniforms.

...It can't be!

"On the request of this land's Testament Union representative, we will secure the Logismoí Óplo. We request Musashi's assistance."

As the guard ship made that announcement, countless figures dropped down from its deck.

The first wave lowered themselves down on the ropes but let go partway down and dropped. The second wave agilely jumped down from the main deck and the side decks. The third wave was directly dropped from landing craft. In total, at least one hundred troops dropped down.

Masazumi could not see across the cityscape, but...

“...!”

They were coming.

“The ether vibration pattern common to the Logismoi Óplo has been detected! This is a 90% match with the data from K.P.A. Italia headquarters... We have a visual!” shouted a voice overhead.

As Masazumi and P-01s stood in the middle of the road, a landing craft passed by overhead and armed students jumped down.

There were 16 of them. As they dropped, a torii-shaped crest appeared behind each of their backs for an instant to slow their fall.

They were positioned to surround Masazumi at a distance of about ten meters.

“...”

She took a breath and pulled strongly on the hand she held.

And then she tried to run.

Not even she knew what purpose there was in trying to flee. However...

...This is wrong.

She did not know what exactly was “wrong”. She did not even know if anything really was wrong.

“Masazumi-sama.”

The hand she pulled on did not move.

As the unit fell from the sky, that girl with her face hidden by the coat and her own bangs asked a question.

“Masazumi-sama, can you not tell me who I am or what I should do?”

•

P-01s thought. Horizon thought.

...Ah.

She thought.

That previous broadcast meant she did not have most of her emotions.

...And I do not know what I should do now.

She had no memories and little knowledge.

...So...

If possible, she wanted her identity to be something she could understand.

For example, being an automaton that worked at a snack shop. It may not have been a perfect understanding, but she mostly understood that.

But this was different.

She was the daughter of the ruler of a place called Mikawa and she was a weapon of mass destruction called a Logismoi Óplo.

What should she do if that was who she was?

...I do not know.

If she had emotions, she thought she would have reacted either positively or negatively toward it.

However, she did not even have that.

And so she thought and gave voice to those thoughts.

“I am P-01s...no, Horizon,” she said. “And there may not be anything you can do for me.”

•

Masazumi opened her mouth reflexively when she heard those words.

She wanted to say this was no time to be saying that.

But a male voice spoke up just as the unit landed around them.

“If you wish to speak as a politician, do not make a mistake here, Masazumi.”

The voice came from directly in front. A man wearing long clothes was walking down the road toward her.

“Father.”

As she spoke that word, the unit took action.

She heard the sounds of weaponry and the sounds of solid shoes. As they looked cautiously around the area, that heavily moving group cut between the man and her.

However, her father continued walking and spoke.

“Masazumi, excellent work.”

A few members of the unit standing between them frantically turned around. One pulled the IZUMO-made bowl-shaped head protector deep over his eyes.

“Thank you for your cooperation,” he said as he touched her hand.

He touched the fingers that were holding P-01s’s hand.

And he removed her hand.

“Ah.”

The automaton’s freed hand moved aimlessly through the air. However...

“...”

It pulled back.

All that remained was Masazumi’s outstretched hand.

“Kh...”

As she slowly pulled her hand back, she saw the automaton standing stock still.

After greeting the recovery unit, Masazumi’s father circled around behind her.

“This is goodbye. When you see her again, she will hold a different position in society. How about you say something to her now for the sake of the future?”

Masazumi strongly clenched her back teeth.

...The future!?

Her inherited name had no future. But that automaton...

...Are you saying she has a future!?

Just when she was about to ask that, something else happened.

“In other words, this is what I am meant to do,” said the automaton. “I do not know what I should do. Knowing who I am does not tell me what to do and I cannot even leave that decision to my emotions. In that case, I should accept the identity I have been told is mine and act as history wishes me to. That is the best decision if I am to make no mistakes and not cause any problems.” She took a breath. “The best decision is to accept the name Horizon Ariadust and act as that identity would have me act.”

•

The retrieval unit and everyone else there turned toward her, but more because she spoke her name than because of what she was saying.

She stood still and opened the lips visible below her bangs and the coat over her head.

“I do not know who I am as Horizon, but I understand that the current situation is telling me what I should do. If I am indeed Horizon, the daughter of the ruler of Mikawa...”

She raised her head before Masazumi.

The coat fell from her head and to her shoulders, revealing her face.

Her expressionless face had white skin and eyes that appeared fixed in place. That was the same face as always.

Automatons had no emotions.

Even if they had a soul, emotions were a different matter. They could gain emulated emotions from their knowledge and experiences, but she did not have the experience required for that.

However, her expressionless lips parted and produced words.

“...then I intellectually know who I am. In a time of emergency, one who rules a country will give up his or her life to take responsibility and let his or her people live on.”

Masazumi opened her mouth in response. She hung her head down in front of Horizon.

“That is...”

She could not bring herself to say “not true”.

This was the world of the warring states. It was often done in the form of retirement or expulsion, but it was not unusual for responsible parties to commit “suicide”. Some truly did commit suicide and some, like Motonobu’s son Lord Nobuyasu, were forced into it.

...What can I say to comfort her?

Masazumi could not come up with an answer, so she remained silent.

And amid that silence, a female member of the unit dropped down from the empty landing ship while attached to a suspension device.

After checking on the work and procedure, she bowed and took Horizon’s hand.

And she began to take Horizon away.

At that exact moment, a sudden voice reached them. It came from the shopping district at the stern of the ship.

“Horizon!”

It was a boy’s voice. Masazumi turned toward the owner of the voice and broke her silence.

“Aoi!?”

•

Masazumi saw a few people run in from the shopping district.

The person at the front of the group shouted out.

“Horizon!”

It was the boy named Aoi Toori who was nearly tripping as he ran.

He was not running particularly quickly, but he reached out with his arms in his desire to move forward and his body was tilting forward. His disheveled hair and lowered head hid his expression.

But his voice was clear.

“Please wait!”

He arrived.

After crossing the long block between the shopping district and the business district, he was more or less there. When the lights of the long block lit them up from the front, Masazumi realized they were all her classmates.

She saw Aoi, Urquiaga, Neshinbara, and Noriki.

Seeing them, Masazumi opened her eyes in self-realization.

She had learned a lot on this day. And...

...Had you realized it!?

Everyone aboard Musashi had been told that P-01s was Horizon during the earlier broadcast.

...But why can you use that name so soon?

Using that name made it sound like he had always known she was Horizon.

...Why?

As if to reject any possible answer, nearby guards frantically began to run over to Aoi and the others. Their initial reaction was to run over and the commander of the unit spread out his arms to block the students' path.

“Wait! Stay back!!” shouted Neshinbara from behind Aoi. “The president of Musashi and of the student council has merely come to greet the household of Mikawa!!”

He was the president of both Musashi's Academy and its student council. He may have been called useless and incompetent, but he still had authority. And so the men running over hesitated and lowered their speed.

As if in response, Urquiaga and Noriki took a step forward and cut in.

“Open a path!”

The two of them created a path by using their running momentum to push aside the guards on the left and right.

There were now fewer than ten meters between Aoi and Horizon.

And when he stretched out his arm, Aoi and the other three were quickly defeated by some figures who fell down from the sky.

•

They were a unit from K.P.A. Italia.

They had arrived by way of an overhead landing ship from the Musashi guard ship.

They wore light armor and their faces were visible beneath protective headgear. All of them were in their twenties or thirties. Their builds were different from those of the Musashi students, as was the way they held their arms and legs.

Urquiaga was gigantic and had muscular strength on the level of the demon race, but he was unable to move when four of them held down the joints of his limbs. The only one who managed to act was Noriki. He immediately escaped the men restraining him and...

“...!”

Torii-shaped crests appeared on both his arms and he sent high-speed blows into the K.P.A. Italia commander.

Two clear sounds rang out.

However, the commander showed no concern. Finally, he tilted his head.

“Now that’s a light blow!” he said while sending a fist back at Noriki.

The man’s fist jabbed upwards directly into Noriki’s gut.

Air burst from Noriki’s mouth and he doubled over. The commander then slammed his fist into the top of Noriki’s head to send his slender body to the ground.

He instructed his nearby men to restrain Noriki.

“I am glad you came. On the Testament Union’s instructions, I would like to transfer your authority here. And...”

“Are you taking Horizon away!?” cried Toori.

One of the men holding him down moved.

The man holding Toori's right arm bent that arm behind Toori's back until it creaked. He then pushed.

He intended to dislocate the shoulder and he showed no sign of hesitation. He took action all at once.

To endure it, Toori changed his position and tried to lift his hips up. However...

"...!"

The other two holding him slammed him into the ground.

His arm stretched out all at once, the joint twisted, and Toori's mouth opened.

"Kah!"

A noise halfway between a breath and a voice came out.

And...

"I have determined that is meaningless."

Horizon's voice brought it all to a stop.

•

Masazumi wordlessly looked toward Horizon who stood in front of her.

She looked at her expressionless face and eyes. She looked the same as always, but she was holding a book out toward Masazumi.

The book contained the words and actions of leaders and politicians.

Masazumi took the book and Horizon spoke.

"I merely have to do what that book described, correct? I can learn from the patterns of the past."

"..."

"To be blunt, I can guess that this commotion would not have occurred if I had been quickly secured as a leader. I do not think dragging this out with this sort of commotion is the best plan."

"Then why did this happen? Are you saying you don't know this guy?" asked

the commander.

Horizon looked straight back at him.

“Once I am secured, I will have no connection to him. ...Does anything else matter?” She took a breath. “I have determined that this sort of commotion will not occur again once I have been secured. Please hurry. This should be enough. Or do you hope to injure those aboard Musashi by delaying my capture? To be honest, that is not the best decision.”

Masazumi could tell a few of her lines were identical to ones written in the book she held.

...She is carrying out the “best decision” based on what is written in this book.

She had wanted to know what to do as a ruler. Masazumi could tell that she was desperately making use of the knowledge she had of the past.

As Horizon mixed together lines from the past, the K.P.A. Italia commander finally spoke.

“Testament,” he answered.

As he did, Masazumi heard another low, trembling, and muffled voice. It was a groan coming from Aoi as he was pressed against the ground.

“Horizon!”

He struggled and raised his head, but the men hurriedly pushed it back down.

But...

“Listen, Horizon. I...”

And just as Aoi said that, Masazumi saw something out of the corner of her eye: The K.P.A. Italia commander clicked his tongue and raised his right hand. He held up his fingers in preparation to snap them. And once he did...

...Not good!

Just as that thought came to her, her father whispered in her ear as if to urge her on.

“Did you know?” he asked. “It seems the reason Horizon Ariadust was hit by Lord Motonobu’s carriage was because of a fight with a certain boy. She was hit

after running away from that fight. The boy tried to save her, but failed. Do you know who that boy was?”

She knew.

After the things she had learned today, she knew

That boy had arrived this time as well, but had once more been unable to reach her.

And she realized something else. That afternoon when she had felt cornered in her conversation with her father in that carriage, he had leaped in as if to save her.

She did not know why, but this was the same. Aoi was trying to save someone, and yet...

“ ...”

Masazumi shook her head.

No. This won't work, thought Masazumi. The significance of the situation is just too different.

If Aoi continued speaking here and had his shoulder dislocated, not only would he be injured, but it would create a certain problem. The wound would remain as proof that the Far East had opposed the Testament Union's decision.

A single hasty action could endanger an entire nation. And right now, Aoi was...

“I want to...!”

He spoke and the commander snapped his fingers. At the same moment, Masazumi charged forward.

She had made her decision in an instant.

She ran through the valley-like space between the Far East guards and the K.P.A. Italia guards.

“Shut up, you idiot!”

The K.P.A. Italia commander noticed her, but she took action before he could give any orders. Fortunately, the Far East guards were hesitant to approach the

Testament Union ones and the all the Testament Union guards except the commander were busy restraining the others.

Masazumi kicked Aoi in the head as he tried to speak.

She did not know if this was the right decision or not, but she knew one thing about the method he was using.

...That won't save anyone right now!

She doubted her method was the best, but at the very least, it would save Aoi and the Far East.

And so she threw the kick.

“!”

It hit. Masazumi was not a skilled fighter, but she knew what that kick would do.

Aoi's head shook and finally...

“...”

His body went limp.

He was unconscious, so he could no longer speak. As if to prove it, the mobile shell-wearing men holding him down relaxed.

And then silence fell once more.

However, this renewed silence was quickly broken.

The lack of sound was first destroyed by muttering. Distant voices were heard in the direction of the bow.

Next came light, a trembling, a movement of the air, and finally a distinct voice.

“Hey,” said someone as if taking in a breath. “Mikawa has...”

•

“It has stopped, hasn't it?”

A girl's voice could be heard in the broken city.

After being broken into countless pieces, no light came from the city. The only illumination came from the two moons overhead and the reflections of their light.

Two things in the city reflected the moonlight.

The first were the two false arms of the girl standing unmoving while carrying a young man. The second was the spear held by the man facing her.

The girl adjusted her support of the young man's back and spoke to the man facing her.

"Who won, Tadakatsu-sama?"

"I did of course, Tachibana Gin," said Tadakatsu in a slightly hoarse voice. As he adjusted his stance, a sound similar to spilling water was scattered across the ground around him. "The ley line reactor wasn't destroyed and I can still move."

He gestured to the northwest with his chin. Both the city and New Nagoya Castle were destroyed there, but that destruction was limited to the bottom of the city and the top of the castle.

The barriers from the surface of New Nagoya Castle and a few blocks deep had been torn apart, but the inside was safe. The ley line reactor had not been destroyed. There was one major reason for that.

"Did you cut the Logismoí Óplo's attack with Tonbokiri? That must have taken incredible skill."

"It wasn't hard. I just had Kazuno absorb it and then directly cut her. I tested that thing, if you recall. I can't get rid of the attack altogether, but I can cut if I get the timing right."

And...

"As a result, the attack wasn't enough to destroy the ley line reactor, so I win. This is the short silence before the collapse, but all of this will be gone soon. You take him and leave."

"Then you need to evacuate as well."

"Can you carry that young guy and me at the same time?"

As Tadakatsu spoke, a dark red puddle was forming below his feet.

His leg and foot had been horribly gouged out and the steam of his body heat was constantly rising from it. When he had cut the tearing of Lypē Katathlipsē, his leg had been taken out by it.

“I am sorry,” said Gin while suddenly lowering her head.

Tadakatsu laughed as his blood spilled to the ground.

“Well, this is part of the job, too. And because I did a good job, Mikawa will soon disappear. That’s all there is to it.”

“Why does Lord Motonobu insist on destroying Mikawa with the ley line meltdown?”

“You heard what he said, right? This is the Genesis Project. The Genesis exam question can be answered with the Logismoι Óplo and the other teaching materials. And if you want to cheat and get a head start on everyone else...” He took a breath. “Then you can fight me.”

“Do not joke. I...”

“You are Tachibana Gin. ...You are the daughter of Tachibana Dousetsu, master of Tachibana Muneshige. The Testament descriptions say you were forced to succeed Dousetsu because of your excellent combat skill.”

Gin half-closed her eyes as she listened to Tadakatsu, but she did not avert her gaze.

“Ultimately, my father accepted Muneshige-sama into the family as my husband and let him take the surname Tachibana. That was the decision.”

“None of that means you’re weak.”

•

“Unfortunately,” said Gin. “The higher ups have banned me from engaging in combat.”

Her uniform had a few different pieces of equipment attached and she used a finger of one false arm to press the controller crest on her side. With a light sound of air, various parts of her uniform entered a mode where they would

harden when under pressure.

“Muneshige-sama fights enough for the two of us. He is a child who loves fighting.”

“Hey,” said Tadakatsu. He glanced around the area. “Did you decide to come here yourself?”

“No. I am not a child, so I asked for permission. ...Although I did arrive before I received a response.”

As she spoke, Gin used her right false arm to drape Muneshige over her shoulder. He let out a small groan and his weight was supported by the hardening of her uniform.

Immediately afterward, Tadakatsu took action.

He still stood in the same place while holding Tonbokiri, but his gaze definitely moved toward Gin and Muneshige.

“ ... ”

But his movement stopped there.

A cannon had appeared in the space between him and Gin.

That two meter cannon resembled a cross and floated in midair.

“My false arms contain a Duet Space. I have pulled this Arcabuz Cruz from there,” explained Gin. “The higher ups do not permit me to fight. If you insist on fighting, I will use this as a shield and retreat.”

“Judge.”

Tadakatsu drew back and Gin had the cannon absorbed into the air.

“You will be dropping out of school now, won’t you?” she asked.

“Can’t you call it quitting while I’m ahead?”

“Even if you drop out here, the rules of heredity still apply. Muneshige-sama might have an opportunity to fight the second Tadakatsu-sama.”

“That guy really doesn’t like to lose, does he?”

“Do you need a mirror to look in? I have a hand-mirror you could use,” said

Gin as she took a step back.

Even as she left, she did not take her eyes off of Tadakatsu.

As she watched, he smiled.

“Go. I’ll leave the battle to the next one. ...I always wanted to battle your father, though. What a shame.”

“My father would often say the same. It was something about a grudge over you stealing the position of the main character for an Izumo divine transmission anime.”

“Oh, Cutting World Hondalia? That’s about a new breed of human that immediately tries to cut anything and everything. The main character cuts castles, gods of war, and continents. Whenever he sees a man, he wants to circumcise him. To be honest, it’s nothing but trouble for me. When I pass by a child in town, they run away shouting ‘Wah! I’m going to be made into an adult!’.”

“But it is even more trouble for my father. He was made into the uninteresting turtleneck-wearing rival character. Whenever he passes by a child, they shout ‘Ueno! Go to Ueno!’ and continue to repeat that holy land of the god of circumcision.”

“Kids sure are cruel. Tell him to get ready because the movie’ll be out soon.”

“I will,” said Gin while smiling for the first time and bowing.

Doing so shook Muneshige on her shoulder. And then...

“Ah.”

A dull sound came from the ground and the two remained silent for about two seconds. Finally, Tadakatsu spoke.

“Hey, his head hit that rock pretty hard. And now he’s kind of shaking...”

“N-no. Muneshige-sama’s body is soft. You could...um, you could call this a consumption tax on the battle.”

“Oh, so Tres España has started charging consumption taxes? Make sure to pay it off exactly afterward. Also...”

Tadakatsu threw Tonbokiri toward Gin. She caught it in her empty false arm and frowned.

“What are you doing?”

“If he wants a rematch, he can’t have this blown away along with Mikawa. It may not be a Logismoí Óplo, but it’s still a divine weapon. It won’t be an even fight against that boy without this.”

“Testament,” said Gin as she held Tonbokiri up to test its weight.

She took a step backwards, then another, and another.

“I pray it will be an excellent rematch.”

With those words, Gin disappeared. She accelerated and the distance quickly grew.

Tadakatsu was left all alone.

“Now then.”

He turned behind him.

A group was seated around the main western entrance of New Nagoya Castle.

It was Matsudaira Motonobu and the automatons.

•

While spilling blood from his entire body, Honda Tadakatsu walked toward the group seated in front of New Nagoya Castle.

With each step he took, damp spots fell to the ground, but he continued nonetheless. And...

“Hey there, teacher.”

He brought the left of his two empty hands up to his mouth.

“Can I and this join you?”

“Minors may not drink alcohol.”

Tadakatsu’s shoulders relaxed as he heard that voice and saw the automaton’s smile. He continued walking through the soundless, lightless, and empty city.

“Teacher, I’m dropping out.”

“Do not worry. Ii and Sakakibara were pretty much the same.”

“So that just leaves that idiot Sakai. ...He always does really well for being an idiot.”

“That he does,” said Motonobu as he looked up toward the heavens.

Two moons could be seen in the sky.

“This is a good night for drinking while viewing the moon.”

“If this were a Japanese lesson, I would have you write a haiku. Look, the moons are floating in the sake cup. The moons are the surface of the sake. ... That was pretty cool, wasn’t it?” Motonobu then turned toward Tadakatsu. “But who do you think will achieve Genesis?”

“How should I know? I’m not very smart. You’re the one that passed out the materials, so don’t you know?”

“Not at all. I only prepared those teaching materials. I do not know if they are enough on their own. I did not create a direct path to Genesis.” He took a breath. “I only prepared the materials I could. It is up to everyone else to use them or not. What matters is that everyone gives thought to the Apocalypse. All I did was give a few hints.”

“Oh, c’mon. You’re giving a lecture even as Mikawa disappears? Now I regret being the only one left.”

“You get to hear my most welcome advice, so I am sure the others are extremely jealous.” Motonobu stood up. “What will happen with Genesis? What will become of the Apocalypse? Even if the different countries have begun to move, there will still be a lot of people who are asleep, have not noticed, or are unconscious. I want to see how this turns out. I really do.” He turned toward Tadakatsu and showed his teeth in a smile. “But all of us here will take the first step. Participation is better than watching. Experimentation is better than observation. Battle is better than viewing. In that case, I have to charge in at the lead. And...”

Motonobu held up his microphone.

“Class is about to begin.”

In the next instant, New Nagoya Castle was annihilated in an explosion.

•

Tadakatsu smiled as he saw the light of the explosion approach.

He could not actually tell whether he was smiling or not, but his mind that was hazy with blood loss was convinced he was smiling.

...Honestly.

The pressure of the ether light and the approaching wall of light enveloped Motonobu and the automatons first.

For an instant, Tadakatsu saw Motonobu lightly waving toward him. And so he opened his mouth.

“Hey,” he said in a voice not even he could hear. “I never got my sake.”

He felt a sudden presence to his left.

He looked over and saw a woman.

He knew her and had often enjoyed verbal exchanges resembling arguments with her.

She held a filled sake cup toward him with a smile. He smiled bitterly back.

“It’s still too soon for you to show up.”

He took the cup.

He could see the moons reflected in the cup.

It’s just as he said, thought Tadakatsu.

Long ago, he had drunk sake while viewing the moon with his friends.

But this time, Tadakatsu took the jewel in his left hand and placed it in with the moons floating in the cup.

This was what he could do now.

“The finest elegance... Well, I actually don’t understand elegance enough to say for sure.”

He brought the sake cup to his mouth.

And he tasted blood. But then his consciousness suddenly cleared.

He sighed and his vision cleared as well.

He was there. He stood in an empty city with a wall of light pressure approaching.

“...!?”

He was holding his left hand up as if it held a sake cup. His fingertips held a bloody blue jewel.

When he noticed that, Tadakatsu smiled and held it up into the sky.

He held the jewel up alongside the two moons.

“I remember laughing long ago after telling you this: Look, the moon was already cut in two,” he said. “And you answered: Are you proposing to me because you want us to be together?”

Tadakatsu laughed. He laughed loudly. And as he looked at that blue jewel held up next to the moons, he mouthed her name.

“We will never be apart again.”

Immediately afterward, his body, his voice, and the color of the jewel were swallowed up by the light.

•

Mikawa was annihilated with New Nagoya Castle in the center.

The annihilation caused light, darkness, and a massive annihilation of the atmosphere. The destruction covered a diameter of about a dozen kilometers and the light was seen as far away as Oshu and Kyushu.

The explosive annihilation at the blast site in the center of Mikawa began by gouging out a hole in the earth’s crust.

It opened a hole thirteen kilometers across.

Immediately afterward, air began surging into that large-scale opening. The air collided with itself, compressed, searched for a way out, and burst into the sky

like it had been fired from a cannon barrel.

The earth's crust at Mikawa and the city outside the annihilated area were sucked up into the air about three seconds after it began.

The wind had grown cold and white when it was compressed, so it looked like white swords were stabbing up into the night sky.

The blast reached a height of ten kilometers above the surface and wreckage from the city was scattered as far as thirty kilometers away. The movement of the atmosphere caused by the explosion led to localized rainclouds and downpours. The dust from the explosion was knocked to the ground before it could spread too far. Instead, dirty rain poured down across that narrow area.

The suburban areas and the land port had some difficulty defending against the small objects that were thrown that far and dealing with the heavy dust-filled rain. By dawn, they had been damaged a bit, but were headed toward recovery.

The next morning, the different countries began to take action and Musashi was filled with tension. Pope-Chancellor Innocentius, who had been visiting Mikawa, made a certain decision as the temporary representative of the Testament Union.

He announced that the Matsudaira family had to take responsibility for the loss of Mikawa as it was a trading port with the Middle East. Specifically, the family would be destroyed, a replacement family would inherit the name, and the Logismoí Óplo that Mikawa had kept hidden would be given to the Testament Union.

That ninth Logismoí Óplo was combined with the automaton soul of the daughter of Mikawa's ruler.

The soul would be disassembled on Tres España's interrogation ship and the Logismoí Óplo would be removed, but that would mean her suicide because breaking an automaton's soul killed them.

The automaton was confirmed to be the heir to Mikawa in a summary succession check. At 6 AM, she agreed to take responsibility in her role as leader by committing suicide. To avoid any interference with the "suicide", it

would take place at Mikawa that same day.

The time was set for 6 PM.

That was the time of the automaton Horizon Ariadust's "suicide".

Afterword

Okay. If you are here for the first time, welcome. If not, I'm glad we could meet again. (Right!? Right!? You don't have any bad memories about this, right!?) This is Kawakami Minoru.

As always, I have ended up creating my usual type of fairy tale that you can't call science fiction but can't call fantasy either. I actually had the idea for this world quite a while ago, but my lack of knowledge prevented me from gathering the architecture of the entire world together properly. This is my revenge match twenty-odd years later. I have the plot prepared to the end, so I hope I can write it all. In fact, I feel like I will have overcome my old self a bit if I finish it.

Oh, about the illustrations. This volume's illustrations have a lot of spoilers, so watch out if you like to look at them ahead of time. When we make them, we don't plan on you looking at them in advance, so a lot of people fell victim to them in the previous series.

Also, please understand that the world history, Japanese history, phenomena, *etc.* in this novel are my personal interpretations which are focused on the fictional story I am writing. The people and military commanders from different countries in world history and Japanese history also show up in video games a lot these days. I just hope that and this novel will get you interested in them.

Now for the customary chat. This one is an email conversation.

"I'm not going to let you all read it ahead of time anymore, but say something. Maybe you can talk about memories from your school days."

"A story from my school days? Well, the other day..."

"Wait, wait. You're ignoring my request right off the bat? Are you an afterword destroyer? I really got a terrible draw this time!"

“Just listen. The other day, it was really hot, so I stripped naked and started cooking some yakiniku in a frying pan on the kitchen stove. When I got to the main event, the Japanese Black beef, the accumulated oil flew onto my penis. I was in so much pain that I held my crotch and rolled around on the floor.”

“Don’t tell me to ‘just’ listen when you’re going to tell me something like that.”

“I don’t care. Anyway, I shouted out ‘ouch!’, but my tongue instinctually rolled up in just the right way to pronounce the word like a fluent English speaker. I think I might actually be British.”

“Do you have any idea how the middle and high schoolers who read this are going to feel? Also, wear an apron.”

“You’re right. I think I’ll go cool off my penis by equipping an ice apron with fire elemental resistance.”

I’m not sure I want to know why he said that as if it was an ongoing event. He also needs to stop saying “penis” so much.

Anyway, this book was a mostly peaceful beginning. I listened to Yuki’s “Nagai Yume” (I love the lyrics, but also wish I had the same energy) while writing it. I wrote the following while listening to it just now:

“Who is most bound by who they are?”

And I’ll leave it at that.

The second half should be coming soon. Wait for the efforts(?) of Toori and the others in about a month.

July 2008. A morning with an inaccurate weather forecast.

-Kawakami Minoru

Notes

1. ↑ Hinduism.
2. ↑ Taoism.
3. ↑ Note that history was being repeated here, thus Caesar used the word “again”.
4. ↑ An epithet of Indra, god of thunder. This implies that “Raitei-san” controls lightning too.
5. ↑ In Japanese, Toori was using the alternative readings of each kanji here. 武(mu), 蔵(kura), の(no), 行(kou), 政(masa), 区(ku), 分(fun). The right reading for 武蔵の行政区分 is Musashi no Gyousei Kubun.
6. ↑ Yoshinao refers to himself as Maro. Maro is an ancient form of “I”. Whenever he uses pronouns like “I”, “Me”, or “Myself”, he always uses Maro. So it will be rendered as the royal “we”.
7. ↑ It seems in Toori’s head, slap means boobslap.
8. ↑ Spoken like a civil servant.
9. ↑ Da (De-su) → De-arū (De-arimasu) → De-gozaru (De-gozaimasu). The latter is a rather old form of the modern copula, mostly used by samurai and ninja in Japanese light novel literature.
10. ↑ This is a reference to 闇鍋 (dark pot), a potluck (stew variety) eaten in the dark (as entertainment). 光鍋 (light pot) is used, due to the rather bright reactions of lit magnesium. The following sentence uses 光臨 (to show respect), but this is a pun with 光 (light), saying that the pot welcomes everyone. This was changed to something that actually makes sense in English.
11. ↑ Azuma uses 余, a rather old masculine first-person pronoun.
12. ↑ Shirasago contains the character 白, which means white.
13. ↑ 告白を通る (To succeed in a confession) → 通し道歌 (Song of Passage); take note of the shared character.
14. ↑ Last line of the Song of Passage.

15. ↑ Daughter of Da (HonDA TaDAkatsu/Da-chan).
16. ↑ Like [right to life](#), except in terms of existence.
17. ↑ The “Toori” in Aoi’s name is pronounced the same way as 通り, the latter half of Remorse Way.
18. ↑ 榊原 (Sakakibara) as opposed to 神原 ([Ne]shinbara). The 木 is removed.
19. ↑ Koushu is the pronunciation of 公主 (Princess) Tachi is a word that establishes plurality, so it is used in the case of the name ‘Princesses’.
20. ↑ Written with the verb meaning “to dry”.
21. ↑ The pronoun used here indicates that the speaker is Azuma.
22. ↑ The pronoun Azuma uses to refer to himself is pronounced “yo”.